

ICONO-CLASH: WHOOPI GOLDBERG AND THE (RE)PRESENTATION
OF BLACK WOMEN IN HOLLYWOOD FILM

By

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This dissertation examines the filmic work of Whoopi Goldberg. Goldberg is the most prolific Black actor in Hollywood film. This dissertation looks at the reasons for and ramifications of her success. Mainstream or Hollywood film constructs images of Whoopi Goldberg that are palatable for its audiences. Often these constructions of Goldberg hark back to the mammy figure. It is possible to theorize the attitude of Hollywood film and mainstream audiences toward Black women, given the way they consume their most celebrated Black star.

It is no secret that Hollywood has more often than not worked to perpetuate images of Black women born out of racial stereotypes and tensions. Critics such as Donald Bogle, bell hooks, Clyde Taylor and Jacqueline Bobo constantly call Hollywood to task for its continued depiction of Black women

as jezebels, tragic mulattos, matriarchs, and mammies. Yet, Hollywood continues to promote Goldberg and her persona as supernurturer. Because of the place she already occupies and will occupy in film history, it is imperative that her contribution to film be examined critically. This dissertation examines her roles in films that capitalize on the body presence of a Black woman, but which empty her of all cultural significance. Also taken to task are depictions of her as the desexed or asexual odd woman whose major function in her films is to further the narrative of a white character. Given Goldberg's phenomenal talent it is difficult to label her roles stereotypical and caricature driven. Yet, the evidence to support just such a hypothesis is overwhelming.

INTRODUCTION

I became interested in film and the power of images after watching *Daughters of the Dust*, from Julie Dash. As I sat in the theater struggling to understand the Gullah dialect spoken by the characters, I remember being overwhelmed by the images. I had never before seen so many Black women, on one movie screen, who kept all their clothes on, and who were not fleeing from the "massa." I was inspired by the range and depth of Black womanhood Dash's film represented. There were young girls and old women in the film, and neither state was presented as preferable. I saw wrinkles and gray hair right next to nubile young bodies. I saw yellow women and blue-black women and women the color of caramel. Blackness was celebrated, embraced, and even touted in a way I had never seen. I realized as I left the theater that I had never before departed an encounter with the silver screen thinking Black women, Black people as a whole, were beautiful.

After that occasion, I knew that I wanted to write a paper that centered around film and the way Black women are (re)presented in it. It was not difficult to choose Whoopi Goldberg as the impetus of my dissertation. She seems at times to be only Black woman making Hollywood films. In a

career that has spanned only fifteen, Whoopi Goldberg has managed to star in almost 30 films (this figure does not include supporting roles and cameos). I began to ponder the mechanism of Hollywood. I wondered why Goldberg could and did make so many films and why she rarely appeared in movies with other Black people.

Given the lateness of the century and the length of time Hollywood has had to master its techniques, it seems odd that the Hollywood machine still fails to present complex and multi-dimensional images of Black women in general and of Goldberg in particular. I could only conclude that Black women are still caricatures in American media. While at one time the Black woman was only defined as the tragic mulatto, the jezebel, the castrating matriarch, and the mammy, current parodies have taken on even more detrimental connotations. There has been a significant shift toward even more sexually charged stereotypes that work to define Black women. The castrating matriarch has been transformed into the welfare queen. The jezebel is now a bitch and a ho.' Even the mammy has moved away from the image of being desexualized because she is emotionally the quintessential nurturer and physically obese to desexualized because she is the only caricature whose overt sexuality is not a question. Because the Black woman can be daily (even hourly) consumed in any one of her stereotypical capacities, she has in many ways come to represent *only* these things in America. Goldberg, as a major Hollywood actor, seems to be the most readily available

counterpoint to this imagery. Yet Goldberg, in many ways, depicts only the re-working of the mammy figure into the star of a film.

It is no secret that Hollywood wields great power in America because it manipulates images. These images can be even more powerful than words because Hollywood fashions the kinds of images that leave little room for alternate interpretations. Hollywood continues to serve up images of the Black woman that mainstream (typically white) audiences want to see or are comfortable seeing. As a result, a talented actor like Goldberg is continually limited to roles that nurture and further a white character's development.

This dissertation acknowledges the criticism of Goldberg as a modern-day mammy figure. It also acknowledges Hollywood's complicity in continuing to present stereotypes of the Black woman overall. Whiteness seems to need Blackness in order to define itself. Whiteness needs to be juxtaposed against negative or nonexistent images of Black sexuality, negative or nonexistent images of Black woman/motherhood and Black relationships in general, in order to mark itself as what is normal. Nowhere is this more apparent than in mainstream cinema's lone Black female star. Goldberg is stripped of culture, sexuality, and family, so she is more palatable to mainstream audiences.

This disseration uses works by Patricia Hill Collins, Lola Young, and Jacqueline Bobo (among others) to elucidate the very real problems and the very real pain of constantly

being reduced to stereotypes in this culture. Black women have had to articulate a theory of themselves in the wake of a brutal history of being women in America. The importance and power of popular culture as a whole is discussed in hopes of elucidating the reciprocative relationship between mainstream cinema audiences and the Hollywood movie-making machine which operates in defining Black women in the media.

CHAPTER 1
THE MAMMY AS METAPHOR: BLACK WOMEN ON SILVER SCREENS

History

Cinematic depictions of the Black woman have rarely presented her as a full characterization worthy of critical attention. She has seemingly only existed to further the development of the major characters in a film. This has resulted in the black woman becoming hyperfragmented. She is shown as little more than a caricature, with little opportunity to be developed fully. According to Gloria J. Gibson-Hudson,

the black woman, as presented within mainstream cinema, is a one-dimensional depiction. Black women are shown as sex objects, passive victims, and as "other" in relation to males (black and white) and white females. . . . Consequently, these representations limit the probability of an audience seeing black women as figures of resistance or empowerment. (25)

Typical images of the black woman lack multiple and complex meanings. Among the most prevalent of these one-dimensional renderings are the tragic mulatto, the sapphire, the matriarch, and of course the mammy (Bogle 9). Of these caricatures none has been more apparent or successful than that of the mammy.

The mammy has resurfaced again and again in American film, from *Birth of a Nation* to both screen versions of *Imitation of Life*. Whether lacing Miss Scarlett's bodice or peeling grapes for Mae West, the mammy figure has several defining psychological characteristics. The mammy usually exhibits a memorable screen presence (she is either extremely witty or a buffoon), is nurturing and self-sacrificing, is highly spiritual, and is necessarily disconnected from her ethnic community. Perhaps the modern Black actor who is most often associated with this stereotype and whose screen personas embody these images most readily is Whoopi Goldberg. In Donald Bogle's *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies and Bucks*, he compares Goldberg to Hattie McDaniel--the quintessential mammy figure (331). In "Denying her place: Hattie McDaniel's Surprising Acts," Stephen Bourne points out that the only two Black women to have won Academy Awards are Hattie McDaniel and Whoopi Goldberg (30). There is much criticism of Goldberg's tendency to be cast in roles that mimic "mammying." She is usually the only black character of narrative importance and ends up helping to guide her white cast mates through some great dilemma. This chapter hopes to draw attention to the way in which the cinematic images of Whoopi Goldberg have been and remain splintered and over-dramatized caricatures. It will also point to cinema's traditional process of defining black women in fragmented ways as parallel to the way they are defined in society; and to the fact that society (and cinema as an extension of it)

benefits from the act of definition. As society defines Black women, it simultaneously constructs itself. This will lead to a reading of Goldberg's imagery as the apotheosis of the mammy figure.

While she is contemporary cinema's most prolific, financially successful and well-known black actress, there is relatively little scholarly criticism that engages the character and characterizations of Whoopi Goldberg. In what is perhaps the definitive work on African Americans in Hollywood cinema, Donald Bogle's *Toms, Coons, Mammies, Mulattoes, and Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Films*, Goldberg garners perhaps a page. Most of that page is spent describing Goldberg as the latest mammy figure. She fares even worse in bell hooks' latest effort at film criticism, *Reel to Real*. hooks sees Goldberg's *Corrina*, *Corrina* as Goldberg's "break from her usual racist, sexist role as mammy or ho" (74). But even if a substantial portion of Goldberg's phenomenal body of work can be criticized for its perpetuation of the mammy figure, the sheer magnitude, and solitude, of her status in Hollywood deserves adequate critique.

As we enter into the next century, much of film criticism, at least from an African American perspective still levels charges of racism and racist sexism at Hollywood and the media in general. Yet Goldberg's very presence and power, in terms of marketability, in the movie industry seems to circumvent such allegations. After all here is a

woman who is, at least physically, readily identifiable as a Black woman receiving top billing in Hollywood. She is certainly not one of the tragic mulattos embodied by Fredi Washington or Dorothy Dandridge. Neither is she a supersexed action heroine like Pam Grier (of black exploitation fame). In roughly 30 feature films, Goldberg has received star billing. Yet Black film critics, moviegoers, Feminist and Womanist critics alike continue to be dissatisfied with the kind of vehicles in which Goldberg has achieved her success.

Whenever Goldberg is addressed in serious film scholarship, she is labeled a mammy figure. The kinds of roles she has received lock her firmly into a stereotype long used by the dominant society, and even Black people themselves, to define Black women. While Goldberg's response has often been that at least she is working, and while white America's response has been to give her an Oscar and the latest People's Choice Award for favorite entertainer, many Blacks continue to be outraged, even wounded by the double meaning of Goldberg's success.

In order to understand the significance of labeling Goldberg a mammy, it is first necessary to trace the conception and use of this term and image that is, perhaps, just as loaded as the word nigger. The scholarship on the imagery of the mammy, particularly when it is generated by Black women, is tainted with not only disdain, but pain. When writers like Trudier Harris, Patricia Hill Collins and bell hooks engage the mammy, she is not a historical concept but a

contemporary enemy. For them, the mammy is not only alive, but doing exceptionally well. She is still as powerful an image at the turn of this century as she was at the turn of the nineteenth century.

Once the history of the mammy is traced in this chapter, it will be possible to understand the strength of her visual imagery when she has been used as a weapon against Black women, and why Goldberg is viewed as acquiescing in the plot. Next I examine the implications of a contemporary cinema which continues to prefer images of Black women that are one-dimensional caricatures. Lastly, I critique several of Goldberg's movie roles that have been accused of perpetuating the images associated with the mammy. These movies include *Clara's Hart*, *Corrina, Corrina*, *Sister Act I/II*, and *Bogus*.

Throughout the work, I capitalize Black and Blackness in order to draw attention to Blackness as a culture and not just a skin color. Just as African American, Native American, Indian and Chinese are capitalized, I treat Black or Blackness in the same way. I believe that white Americans, and often Black Americans themselves, sometimes view Black people as white people that have failed at being white. Black people are not white people who didn't get white skin. They should not be penalized for not acting or thinking like the majority. Black Americans are a unique and different conglomerate of cultures and skin colors--just like white people. I use the term Black instead of African American, because not all Black people can identify themselves solely

with an African/American heritage. For instance, there are Black Americans of Jamaican, Haitian or Canadian descent. By capitalizing Black and Blackness I want to move these terms away from being words that solely trigger thoughts of skin color toward words that denote culture. Additionally, I do not capitalize white to also draw attention to it. Whiteness is so often the normalizing factor that when one refers to people, for example, they are automatically thought of as white, while any other kind of people are clearly denoted by an identifier like Black people, Chinese people etc. Even more attention is drawn to the word white when the word Black is capitalized. Rather than advancing any theoretical agenda, I hope that these choices in punctuation will simply provoke thought.

Chloe, Queenie, Beulah, and Delilah: Histories, Not Hers

In *Black Feminist Thought*, Patricia Hill Collins contends that the Black woman has always had to negotiate mythic identities. While the battle to defy or even reify mythological identities is waged across the board--every group has a stereotype to combat--Black womanhood seems peerless in its suffering. But the mammy is only one of the Black woman's nemeses; they also include the equally denigrating jezebel/whore and, of late, the welfare queen. This point is emphasized by Hill-Collins when she writes that "portraying African-American women as stereotypical mammies,

matriarchs, welfare recipients, and hot mommas has been essential to the political economy of domination that fosters Black women's oppression" (67-68).

It is no secret that antebellum society began defining the Black woman in ways which would edify/justify their appropriation of her body, her labor and her family. As a result of this need powerful myths about Black women were used from the Middle Passage to the auction block and found fertile soil in the cotton and cane fields. Her humanity was de-emphasized while her sexual appetites and fecundity were exalted. The most readily available and widespread myth was that of the Black whore/breeder woman. She was a completely carnal creature incapable of reason and morality. This mythical Black woman's wantonness coupled with her ability to procreate gave reason enough to control and subjugate her. In *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom: 1750-1925*, Herbert G. Gutman quotes *New York Sun* reporter Frank Wilkeson. Upon visiting St. Helena Island, South Carolina, just after emancipation, Wilkeson wrote that his prior notions about Black women had been confirmed.

Almost without exception, the women of these islands, who have Negro blood in their veins, are prostitutes. It is a hopeless task to endeavor to elevate a people whose women are strumpets. . . . Their personal habits are so filthy, that I suspected that venereal disease was wide-spread among them. (532)

Wilkeson, writing for what was, at the time, a preeminent newspaper, affirms not only his, but much of society's belief that Black women were uncivilized and primitive. Comments like these were not limited to journalistic tracts but were widely accepted. Much of this type of folklore was used to make Black women easily accessible to white men. For, if the Black woman was all sexual appetite it would be impossible to rape her; if she were all sexual appetite it would be impossible to hurt her by selling away her children and/or her "husband." If she were nothing but raw lust and unrestrained passion it was not likely one could physically work her too hard. Thus the mythology comprising the Black whore stereotype, along with all the others, was invaluable in maintaining patriarchal, socio-economic and gender divisions and hierarchies.

A further extension of the Black whore is the Welfare Queen. The notion of the Welfare Queen is so firmly cemented within the popular imagery of the Black woman that it becomes unnecessary to even add "black" before the term as an signifier. If the Black woman spends all of her time in bed then it is inevitable that she ends up with a multitude of children for which she is incapable of caring. In the

antebellum south, slavery was the perfect solution to her promiscuity. But while the Black woman's sexual appetite produced useful additions to the slave workforce, the Welfare Queen's progeny drains society financially and morally. Currently, the Welfare Queen has had to be arrested because of her reckless sexual appetite that swells the Welfare roles. Hill Collins writes:

Essentially an updated version of the breeder woman image created during slavery, this image provides an ideological justification for efforts to harness Black Women's fertility to the needs of a changing political economy. (*Black Feminist Criticism*, 76)

Again, the construction of the Black woman as a irresponsible, irrepressible breeder justified the dismissal of her maternal instincts, and more recently merits the push to do away with social programs suspected of helping her perpetuate her immorality.¹

Thus, the popular images of the Black woman as Whore and Welfare Queen were historically, and are currently, useful in defining and maintaining the Black woman's position in society. These kinds of images of Black women have become so commonplace that there seems to be nothing unusual or noteworthy about them anymore. Even though the mammy image has undergone a makeover, she still exists in and is essential to the fabric of American popular culture.²

¹ The Whore and Welfare Queen are discussed further in Chapter Two which explores sexuality and Whoopi Goldberg.

² Here I make reference to the updating of the image on the Aunt Jemima pancake mix box circa 1990. Aunt Jemima loses her head wrap, a historical signifier of the mammy figure and is re-presented with

Invariably, the mammy remains, and is as effective in defining the way dominant society thinks about Black women, as are the "black ho" who is consumed daily in music videos and talk shows, and the Welfare Queen stereotype which is bandied strategically about on the evening news.

Again, the genesis of the mammy figure comes directly from American slavery mythology. None of these mythical identities created during Slavery were meant to accurately reflect who the Black woman really was, but were rather generated out of necessity. The mammy figure grew largely out of a need slave owners had to create surrogate mothers/nurturers for their legal and out-of-wedlock children. Not only were these black women expected and encouraged to care for their white charges at the expense of their own families, but at the expense of their individuality. According to Trudier Harris, the Black serving woman's role became more important than she was herself; "she should cook, clean, take care of the children--and be invisible or self-effacing" (11-12). Herein lies the crux of the Black woman's problem with the image of the mammy and indeed, with all of the stereotypes that make up popular notions of Black womanhood. The uses of these stereotypes cause the Black woman to cease to exist as anything but her type in the eyes of dominant society, and eventually in her own eyes. The Whore, the Queen, and the Mammy are just that.

chemically relaxed hair. The new hairstyle does not alleviate the traditional meaning behind the Black woman on this pancake box.

They do not love, feel, wish, believe or do any of the other things commonly associated with one who possesses personhood. While it was important that the Whore and the Queen be incapable of bonding with their children, it was even more so with the Mammy. After all, unlike her sister Whores and Queens, the mammy had no sexual appetite. She was at the opposite end of the spectrum when it came to sex and sexuality. The void this negation of sexuality left in her caricature had to be filled with motherly instincts, but only for the master's children--never her own. Again the Black woman is forced to mutate and is reconstructed to fit the needs of the slavemaster. He removes a few of his superbreeders from the confines of their denotations (mammies have no sexual appetites, they exist only to nurture) and endows them with the ability to be supernurturers--but only for his children. Harris writes:

Features inherent in the job made it necessary for the black mammy to deny her own family in order to rear generation after generation of whites who would, ironically, grow up to oppress blacks yet further. (35)

It is the denial of herself and her own family which causes black women critics, in particular, to react so vehemently to the mammy figure. While the mammy bathes, feeds, and coddles her white charges, where are her own children? While she is mammy for Miss Anne and Miss Anne's children and perhaps even Miss Anne's grandchildren, what has become of her own family, her own children, her life?

Popular literature and film have always portrayed being a mammy from the dominant society's perspective. It is a good, even desirable position. Trudier Harris cites a 1938 essay by Jessie Parkhurst denoting the attributes of mammyhood.

If she did not live in the big house, she lived nearby; she dressed well, was not usually punished or sold, and could cultivate an intimacy with the master that none of the other slaves dared. "She was considered self-respecting, independent, loyal, forward, gentle, captious, affectionate, true, strong, just . . . trustworthy, faithful . . ." (35-360)

White people saw mammies in this way because this is what they needed mammies to be. African American women are wounded by such a depiction because it erased the selfhood of Black women during slavery and denied their individual autonomy.

While the point can be made that slavery effaced all of the slaves' individuality, the image of the mammy is not only about effacement. It is about embracing white culture as that which has the right/is right as opposed to Blackness. In *From Mammies to Militants: Domesticity in Black American Literature*, Trudier Harris asserts that because the mammy's position afforded her access to the inner workings of the plantation house and intimate knowledge of the plantation family, the mammy began to "see whites as the models for everything good and right, while black was ugly and undesirable" (36). The contention is that such close association with the source of Black people's oppression and their relatively privileged position at the top of the slaver hierarchy, caused mammies

to identify with whiteness, and shun their own culture and kind. Harris continues with her appraisal by accenting the rigid boundaries between the mammy and the other plantation slaves.

Mammy's self-respect was lost in groveling before and fawning upon her mistress, master, and young white charges. Her loyalty became self-effacement and her affection anticipated the exaggeration of the minstrel tradition. Her piety and patience worked more often than not in favor of the whites, and her tyranny was most ruthless when it was exercised over other Blacks. . . .she also believed in aping white manners . . . and believed herself inferior to those for whom she worked. (36)

The author is brutal in her assessment of the mammy figure as having sold out her own people. While Harris' accusations are scathing, they are important for noting the vehemence with which Black women critics attack the mammy. They are also important because she draws her conclusions largely from studying a particular Black American literature that takes up the trope of the mammy. Thus she is reiterating the way Black authors themselves see the mammy. Harris goes on to conceptualize the mammy as a traitor among slaves and eventually a traitor among early and middle 20th century Blacks. Harris critiques Charles Chesnutt's Mammy Jane in *The Marrow of Tradition*, Ann Petry's Lutie in *The Street*, and the Opal Simmonds character in *dem*, by William Melvin Kelley.

Thus the conceptualization of the mammy figure is manifold in this society. Many Black authors and critics see the mammy as an apostate member of her race and the final and triumphant result of internalized racism, while a writer like

Lillian Smith (a white-southern-female who benefited from the tradition) waxes nostalgic about the feelings she had for her old mammy. In Smith's novel, *Killers of the Dream*, a bold assessment of the white South for the time, she critiques white people's treatment of Blacks. In her assessment of her mammy she admits to having feelings for her, but having to deny them because truly caring for one's mammy was not supposed to be publicly expressed. According to Smith:

I knew that my old nurse who had cared for me through long months of illness, who had given me refuge when a little sister took my place as the baby of the family, who soothed me, fed me, delighted me with their stories and games, let me fall asleep on her deep warm breast, was not worthy of the passionate love I felt for her but must be given instead a half-smiled-at affection similar to that which one feels for one's do. (28-29)

Whether intentionally or not, Smith romanticizes the plight of her "old nurse." While Smith was partaking of her mammy's stories and sleeping on her breast, and constantly reminding herself that the mammy was not to be afforded the same affection as a mother, the mammy was losing her identity. In the novel Smith continues to criticize the way she was raised as a proper southern lady, yet she still fails to see her mammy as anything other than her own personal nurturer. Mammy does not even garner a name, nor does the audience ever learn whether mammy had her own family. Hence the mammy is perceived quite differently by those whom she cared for and by those members of her culture. The very nature of her bipolar perception marks her as a powerful type in American

society. The dominant society tends to see her as harmless, gentle, even likable, while African Americans see her as a by-product of racism.

According to Patricia Hill-Collins the mammy figure was and continues to be so potent not only because of the multiplicity of readings she generates, but because she helped to perpetuate a certain maternal, economic and psychical order. Hill-Collins writes:

The first controlling image applied to African-American women is that of the mammy--the faithful, obedient domestic servant. Created to justify the economic exploitation of house slaves and sustained to explain Black women's long-standing restriction to domestic service, the mammy image represents the normative yardstick used to evaluate all Black women's behavior. By loving, nurturing, and caring for her white children and "family" better than her own, the mammy symbolizes the dominant group's perceptions of the ideal Black female relationship to elite white male power. (71)

Thus dominant society is comfortable with the mammy figure because there is little tension inherent in their relationship. Andrea Stuart writes in her article, "Making Whoopi," "Indeed, Goldberg's appeal, at least in film, lies perhaps in the fact that she is unthreatening, even relaxing" (13). Stuart reiterates the notion that Whoopi Goldberg is successful because she does not threaten her audience or persuade them to feel guilty or responsible for the state of race affairs in America. Just as the mammy made those she served feel comfortable and did not consciously remind them of either her Blackness or their whiteness, such is the appeal of Goldberg. Therefore, Hill-Collins sees the very

presence or practice of the mammy as an endorsement of her. For Black women who internalize the imagery of the mammy, it will successfully keep them in their places, as constituted by the dominant society. As for the dominant society, they remain comfortable in their power positioning when they only have to meet the Black woman in her role as mammy.

Hill-Collins assesses a reality of African American women's lives that is difficult to articulate. African American women occupy the lowest rung of the economic, social and political totem pole. It is still a surprise when a Black woman is elected into office or is allowed into corporate boardrooms. It is no surprise that Black women still earn less than Black men or white women or that they still have to battle stereotypes labeling them mammies. Hill-Collins is just one of many Womanist/Black Feminist theorists to see the real and imagined lives of Black women being shaped by the unequal and powerful images of her built into the American system. The mammy image, and all that she represents, implies that the Black woman's status in this society is at best ingrained structurally and at worst her own fault, but certainly the best she can hope to achieve. Consequently the most an average African American woman who successfully internalizes such imagery can hope for is to receive employment in the home, business or office building of a white person. She may take care of children, clean the office building or even file papers but she must realize that this is her designated place in society. This is what best suits

her. After all, her only alternatives are the Whore/Welfare Queen images.

The mammy is also powerful because she can define the relationship Black women have with their children. For Hill-Collins, "the mammy image is important because it aims to shape Black women's behavior as mothers" (72). Society on the whole sees the Black woman as bereft of maternal instincts. In *All the Women Are White, All the Men Are Black, But Some of Us Are Brave*, Alice Walker articulates the way Black motherhood is often exhibited.

Perhaps it is the Black woman's children, whom the white woman--having more to offer her own children, and certainly not having to offer them slavery or a slave heritage or poverty or hatred, generally speaking: segregated schools, slum neighborhoods, the worst of everything--resents. For they must always make her feel guilty. She fears knowing that black women want the best for their children just as she does. But she also knows Black Children are to have less in this world so that her children, white children, will have more. . . . Better then to deny that the Black woman . . . Is capable of motherhood. Is a woman. (44)

While Walker speaks specifically about white women's notions of Black motherhood, this interpretation is perhaps universal within the dominant culture. Inherent within the mythology of American culture is the premise that Black women are not only unwilling to mother their own children, but lack the ability to nurture. For Walker, this perceived fault in the Black woman's mothering capabilities allows white society to use the Black woman as a scapegoat. Society at large does not have to bear any of the responsibility for the state of Black

people. The source of inadequate housing, jobs, and opportunities can be traced to inferior parenting.

Black people have long been aware of this brand of inequity built into the system of cultural codes. The Black community has long been aware of the unspoken tenet that stated if Black children failed it was the parents and/or community's fault and not the result of a racially biased system. They knew this just as they "knew" the equally malicious premise that Black women were really incapable of adequately mothering their children. One of the first places critics and theorists of African American culture began to articulate and subsequently combat these issues was in the pages of their fiction. In Toni Morrison's landmark novel, *The Bluest Eye*, the author creates a portrait of a Black woman who has forsaken her children and her selfhood, in exchange for a life on the periphery of a white family. This novel is particularly useful for examining the effects of erasing Black selfhood. Pauline Breedlove has so embraced her life as servant to a white family that she completely turns her back on her own husband and children. Not only has Pauline opted out of Blackness, but her daughter has been so inundated with whiteness as rightness that she too longs for it. While her mother longs to simply fade into the midst of her white employers, Pecola longs for blue eyes. Pecola thinks that when she obtains blue eyes her mother and the rest of the world will suddenly love her. Yet both Pauline and Pecola are mistaken in their assessments.

Pauline Breedlove desires the order and regulation, the cleanliness and calm, the affluence and abundance she sees as belonging to and inherent within the white family. She concludes that by becoming a fervently zealous and therefore indispensable servant, she somehow becomes a legitimate part of the white family. For Pauline, interacting with the family on a daily basis even in minuscule ways makes her worthy of them--makes her one of them. Morrison writes:

Power praise and luxury were hers in this household. They even gave her what she had never had--a nickname--Polly. It was her pleasure to stand in her kitchen at the end of the day and survey her handiwork. (101)

Eventually, Pauline cannot find fulfillment or happiness in her own family or her own culture. She can only experience joy as the servant of her white family. Pauline sanctions an intimacy between herself and her employers that she discourages within her own family. Both her husband and her children refer to Pauline as Mrs. Breedlove. Yet, she is pleased that the white family has abbreviated her name, changed her name, to suit themselves. In a sense she has acquiesced to their re-naming her Polly. Her sense of self, her sense of identity can only be found via interaction with, re-naming by, the white family.

Perhaps Pauline could be offered redemption if it were the lifestyle, the things of the white family she craved. However, Pauline does not covet the white lifestyle for herself and or her family, but desires to become a part the

white life. Pauline's desire is not about herself as a Black woman achieving a similar way of life as her employers but rather becoming, if not one of these people, then joyfully guilty by association. Pauline fantasizes about being white, not about having the same economic opportunities as white people. In one of the most haunting passages in the novel, Pauline recollects the time she would spend at the movies. She arrives early and sits in a darkened movie theater and feels real excitement when the black screen suddenly turns to silver. The theater is one of the first places Pauline begins not only to abandon her sense of reality, but to lose her sense of self-worth as a Black woman. Pauline recalls her forays to the movies as the only time she acquired pleasure.

Then the screen would light up, and I'd move right on in them pictures. White men taking such good care of they women, and they all dressed up in big clean houses with the bathtubs right in the same room with the toilet. Them pictures gave me a lot of pleasure, but it made coming home hard, and looking at Cholly hard. (97)

Pauline Breedlove has done what all psychologically distraught mammies do, she has come to believe that whiteness equals masculinity, femininity, and moral station. Instead of questioning the nuances of a movie, or even a society, where a man's ability to take care of his family is associated with his skin-color and beauty is defined as looking like Jean Harlow, Pauline internalizes what she sees and judges herself and her husband to be lacking. This self-hatred eventually turns to hatred for her husband and her children as well. She

looks at Cholly and the children and is overwhelmed by their Blackness--therefore their incredible lack of whiteness.

Pauline then participates in white life in what she believes is the only way possible for her and for people like her. Pauline partakes of beauty and family in the only way she believes she can. She becomes the perfect servant, the perfection of the mythical mammy, complete with a disdain for her own children. In her assessment of *The Bluest Eye* Trudier Harris writes, "Pauline Breedlove identifies completely with the white world and takes excessive, self-deprecating pride in childrearing, cooking, and cleaning for it" (39).

Pauline's characterization is a classic example of the mammy figure. The mammy is no longer a job description or a position but becomes a state-of-mind. She is representative of the mammy in her worse traditional sense. This character is so inculcated with the legitimacy of her white family, that she rejects anything that is not them, including her own family and her identity as a Black wife and mother. In the end, she confuses intimacy with whiteness with access to it. Pauline Breedlove is the quintessential mammy because the mammy is the purest evidence of the internalization of anti-Black racism.

This curse becomes generational when Pecola Breedlove adopts yet another form of self-effacement. Pecola reacts not only to rejection from her mother, but rejection from her Black community. Not only is Pecola having to negotiate her identity in the face of a mother who rejects Blackness, but

among her Black peers who view hues of Blackness in gradations of acceptability. Pecola is a dark-skinned, short-haired child in a world where those things indicate unattractiveness. She has no loving support system at home to combat the intra-racial stereotyping that occurs. Thus Pecola assumes that blue eyes will make her acceptable. Blue eyes not only represent a physical embodiment of whiteness but a "white" outlook. If Pecola could begin to see the world as white people saw it, she could take on their perception of reality. Again the purpose is to assume a white identity, in lieu of a Black one which is automatically equated with anguish, lack and everything awful. Pecola lies in bed and prays for blue eyes while her parents fight.

It had occurred to Pecola some time ago that if her eyes, those eyes that held the pictures, and knew the sight--if those eyes of hers were different, that is to say beautiful, she herself would be different. . . . If she looked different, beautiful, maybe Cholly would be different, and Mrs. Breedlove too. Maybe they'd say, "Why, look at pretty-eyed Pecola. We mustn't do bad things in front of those pretty eyes." (40)

Pecola, like Pauline, sees escape and dissociation from Blackness as the only solution.

Even at the end novel, when Pecola pays far too much for her blue eyes, Pauline makes no effort to rescue her own child. Pauline goes on being the mammy in its most historic and psychological sense. She continues to be surrogate-mother to her white charges, while her own family dies, disintegrates and slips into madness. For Pauline and

subsequently for Pecola, the only way to deal with being Black is to reject it.

It seems ironic that the same mammy icon that is so inept at nurturing her own children, could then turn around and successfully nurture the children of her white owners. Again this points to the contradictions in slavery, racism, and the production of the mammy figure herself. In the slave infrastructure the same mammy who could and did abandon her own children at least emotionally and spiritually was able to fashion motherly instincts from nothing, and then lavish them upon white children. This is one of the most painful aspects of the mammy figure. It is not the denigrated physical characteristics that defined her or the fact that she was slave labor, but that she could abandon her own precious Black children in favor of the secondhand-mothering of white children which made the mammy the bane of African American culture. Yet this glorification of the mothering of white children and the derisive depiction of Black mothers mothering Black children was necessary to create and sustain the myth of the mammy. This embracing of all that is white, even at the expense of one's selfhood and progeny, marks the Black women as guilty--just as her accusers said. The hurt is only magnified when the mammy's accusers are other Black women. This fact becomes extremely important when examining Goldberg's role as a contemporary mammy figure.

Thus the mammy figure is more than a big, dark-skinned Black woman with a rag on her head and white babies on her

hip. She represents one of the first ways that dominant society manipulated the black woman's imagery for its benefit. Inherent within the negation of the black woman's maternal instincts is a relief from the guilt by whites for treating blacks as they do. If Black people don't love their children then they don't need good jobs or nice homes or welfare to assist them.

The mammy became an archetype like the Black man as rapist or the white woman as flowering femininity. The ideology of the mammy was fashioned to uphold the institution of slavery, justify its needs and misdeeds. Within the African American community the notion of the mammy represents self-hatred and internalized racism at its best. The mammy is a reminder that much of what slavery was designed to do was successful. This imagery remains potent and popular in contemporary society. When Black critics and theorists acknowledge Goldberg, then it is usually as the latest transformation of the mammy.

I Still Need Beulah to Peel Me a Grape

It is possible to turn on the television and consume images of Black women as video 'hos and welfare queens quite readily. The presence of Black women on the television screen has escalated in recent years with the advent of music videos and talk shows. Yet, these kinds of vehicles still present very one-dimensional caricatures of Black women. However, it is the nurturer, the mammy, who still reigns in Hollywood cinema. Yet, the mammy figure does not always make her appearance in the traditional way. She is not just the elderly black woman in charge of white children or a white household, the mammy is much more mutable than that. The mammy, whatever her current physical manifestation is a supernurturer. Super is used here in the sense that it takes the form of an over-extended kind of nurturing. It is a nurturing that goes over and above what is adequate. This kind of nurturing represents the only comfortable way Blackness has been, and evidently can still be, negotiated on screen. Thus the most high profile Black actress in Hollywood is consistently presented in vehicles where her primary purpose is to nurture the white characters.³ Yet, this enigma is not inherent solely in Goldberg's work. Often when

³ Goldberg does not always mammy in the traditional way in every movie. There are some movies in which she plays mad, or highly eccentric characters--which is another prolific use of Blackness in mainstream cinema. In short, Blackness is also acceptable if it is mad. Mad Blackness can end up nurturing whiteness just as well. This is discussed further in Chapter Four.

Blackness is presented on Hollywood screen's it is made more palatable because it's sole function is to further the white narrative.

The way Blackness is presented on screen is of course comparable to the way it is used in literature. In *Playing in the Dark, Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, Toni Morrison examines the ways in which the African presence serves as a "surrogate and enabler" for whiteness (51).⁴ Morrison says that authors like Mark Twain, Saul Bellow, and Willa Cather construct Blackness in their work to buoy whiteness. American literature in general either denies the existence of an African presence, or fills the trope of Blackness with negative meanings that make the trope of whiteness all the more positive and stable--all the more "white." Although Morrison's critique is aimed at literary practices, some of the same tenets hold true for film. Blackness is often seen as negative so that the white characterization can be valorized. Morrison further defines familiar stereotypes of Blacks in literature such as nurses, rescuers and catalyst. In film, these same tropes are utilized as acceptable and necessary ways to present Black characters. This kind of practice is so inherent in literature and film that it becomes almost invisible to the audience. Mainstream cinema audiences are comfortable with

⁴ Morrison uses the term Africanist to represent the "denotative and connotative blackness that African peoples have come to signify, as well as the entire range of views, assumptions, readings, and misreadings that accompany Eurocentric learning about these peoples" (6).

images of Black people as nurturers and enablers, not with fully developed characterizations. Hence, it behooves the film industry to continue to perpetuate the image of the mammy because that is what their audiences are familiar and comfortable with seeing. Mainstream audiences are comfortable seeing what they have always seen and with viewing Blackness as the peripheral character even when she/he is central to the narrative. White audiences are content to see Blackness serving to further the life or development of white characters, with it prompting and saving them in setbacks and in sickness. The result is a cycle that is rarely challenged, the circle remains unbroken. Even when there is evidence that some elements of mainstream audiences can and do watch so-called "Black" movies, for instance the cross-over success *Waiting to Exhale*, the movie industry still does not deviate from its formula.

Yet, even with all the trouble the movie industry has with presenting Blackness on screen there remains a need to do so. Implicit in literature and film which attempt to include some formation of Blackness is a kind of closeted duality. The very creation of the mammy caricature and film's willingness to perpetuate the image implies a double-consciousness in terms of race on the part of the dominant society. Morrison writes:

If we follow through on the self-reflexive nature of these encounters with Africanism, it falls clear: images of blackness can be evil and protective, rebellious and forgiving, fearful and desirable--all of the self-contradictory features of the self. Whiteness alone, is mute, meaningless, unfathomable, pointless, frozen, veiled, curtailed, dreaded, senseless, implacable. Or so our writers seem to say. (59)

Morrison is pointing out the double-handedness in the treatment of Black characters. Accordingly, the same Black women characters who are inferior to whites (male and female) on screen, somehow make great mammies, nurses and confidants. If one looks at the way Whoopi Goldberg is constructed as an actor, her characterizations also exhibit contradictions. Goldberg is constantly portrayed as dispensing the kind of nurturing that white characters cannot forgo. Basic components of the white characters psyche or life education are missing, or in stasis waiting for the super-nurturer to coax it out.

In Tania Modleski's analysis of gender and race in film, she labels Goldberg the "signifier of the signifier" (133). Modleski is drawn to a recoding of Blackness similar to the one defined by Morrison. While no one can argue that Goldberg and many other black actors are not used to perpetuate and sustain whiteness, it is possible to read film's need to represent them so as significant. Perhaps it is an involuntary acknowledgment of the effect naming Blackness has upon naming whiteness.

In *The Imaginary Signifier*, Christian Metz writes about the ability of the signifier to act upon the signified. He uses the word "Bordeaux" pointing to its literal meaning as the sight where a certain wine is produced, and its transmuted meaning as the wine itself (154-158). Of importance here is the ability of the secondary figure to have monumental influence upon and even usurp the place of the primary. Perhaps this theory applies in part to the anxious way in which film deals with Blackness. While the relegation of Blackness into convenient and facilitating caricatures actualizes the hegemony's need to define it; defining Blackness is also the dominant society's way of defining it self. The objectifying gaze does not just push Blackness, Black women specifically, into the margins but subjects them to superfragmented and partial meanings which make complete meanings possible for the objectifier. Defining Blackness makes it easy to be used as a reference point, and self-circumscription in relation to it seems natural. Thus the signifier has "significant" influence in its relationship to the signified. While it is true that relegating Blackness to positions of inferiority makes whiteness appear superior, Blackness does act back upon whiteness to influence its definition. Hence, Morrison's summation of whiteness is that it needs Blackness to exist. In his essay simply titled "White," Richard Dyer writes:

Trying to think about the representation of whiteness as an ethnic category in mainstream film is difficult, partly because white power secures its dominance by seeming not to be anything in particular, but also because, when whiteness *qua* whiteness does come into focus, it is often revealed as emptiness, absence, denial or even a kind of death. (44)

Dyer engages the question of how "whiteness" is defined and acknowledges that the difficulty in doing so is that whiteness is it at once everything and nothing. Whiteness as the normalizing and naturalizing factor in this culture causes everything different from it to be evaluated against it. In the recent past it was almost redundant to mention "white" people, "white" culture and "white" history because people, culture and history were white. This normalcy that whiteness began to represent has not only worked to establish its place as foundational but also causes a self-reflexive definition to be difficult. If whiteness is the standard by which everything else is judged then difference must exist--is necessary--so that whiteness can carry out its function. Thus images of Blacks, like the mammy, become essential to a reading of whiteness in film. Since whiteness is read as what is normal and stable--it is so normal and so stable that difference must be present to keep it from fading away.

Cinema needs Goldberg and the personification of characters like the mammy not only to help sustain it but as a way to negotiate Blackness in a "white" film. Blackness is treated on screen in ways that make it palatable to mainstream audiences. Mainstream audiences are familiar with

images of Blackness as violence, as overt sex, and as sources of super-nurturing.⁵ All of these presentations allow whiteness to go on being white. Yet, no matter the particular style of treatment, Blackness is almost always presented as something to be vicariously consumed and or as something whose rudimentary function is to serve. The result is a chiastic relationship where Blackness then begins to affect whiteness. Consequently there is a need to continue the imagery of the mammy in film.

⁵ Here it necessary to comment on other ways Blackness is presented on screen via Hollywood film. If Blackness is not presented as the catalyst to white development, then it is seen as violent. It can be suicidal, which means Black on Black crime or violence directed at a white character, usually a white woman by a Black male. If Blackness is female and she is not a mammy figure, then she is overtly sexual, yeilding the jezebel/whore or the welfare queen. When Blackness is presented in these ways, then the film is usually "Black" denoting a Black storyline and a majority of Black characters. More often if it is a white film--which is what this project examines--then Blackness is presented in the visage of the mammy.

Harriet, Clara, Corrina, Mary Clarence

Very few of Goldberg's film have received adequate academic criticism. While there are numerous film reviews, the bulk of film criticism as it concerns Goldberg is limited to her first role in *The Color Purple*, and *Ghost*--the movie for which she won an Oscar. With that, the major commentary about *Ghost* coming from Black critics (Bogle, hooks, Lola Young) was that Goldberg was perpetuating the character of the mammy. However, many mainstream commentaries saw Goldberg's performance as phenomenal thus her procurement of an Academy Award. Mainstream audiences love to love Whoopi Goldberg. They find no inherent problem in the kind of roles to which she has access. While Black audiences find Goldberg's isolation from her community disheartening, mainstream audiences seem to read this as liberation from the confines of ethnicity. In "Making Whoopi," Andrea Stuart writes:

Indeed, Goldberg's appeal, at least in film, lies perhaps in the fact that she is unthreatening, even relaxing. To many--black and white alike--her films are a delightful break from our society's endless negotiations on the subject of race, time out, from which we can return refreshed for the next round. And perhaps, therefore, Goldberg is, in a strange way, a hope for the future: a black performer whose black skin is an empty sign, like that of her white counterparts, that simply spells entertainment and does not carry with it the baggage of oppression or history. (13)

Here Stuart is articulating the very reason Goldberg is a bone of contention between Black and white cinema audiences. While it is impossible to speak in terms totality concerning the taste and responses of "Black" and "white" cinema audiences, given a boycott by the NAACP and comments from well known Black cultural and film critics, it seems safe to assume that the overwhelming majority of Whoopi Goldberg fans are white. Stuart assumes that it is possible for moviegoers to completely suspend their belief during the viewing of the film. If that were the case, Goldberg would not have to be completely removed from the Black community in the majority of her films in order to sustain her popularity with white audiences. Stuart assumes that Black audiences find it "unthreatening" to see Goldberg as the only Black person on the screen or of import in her movies. She assumes that Black audiences find her estrangement from Black men and women and children as "relaxing." I would argue that the abdication from Black culture is precisely why Goldberg is not popular with Black audiences, and why she is associated with the mammy figure. Again, the most painful aspect of the mammy figure for Black people is her separation from other Blacks whether coerced or circumstantial. Perhaps Goldberg does represent "a break from society's endless negotiations on the subject of race" for white people, but that is not the case for African diasporic audiences. While Stuart's call for a racial time-out may read well, society is not there yet. One of the few places where Blacks can rest from racial battles

is in a place (or at a movie) that reaffirms their viability. This resting place is definitely not at a Whoopi Goldberg movie.

Goldberg's skin like the skin of other Blacks is far from empty as a signifier. It is the Black skin's loaded connotation that makes it possible for white skin to be an "empty sign." One of the inferences of Black skin is precisely that it "spells entertainment." Stuart, like many mainstream audiences, presumes that because Goldberg is palatable for them, that she is also navigable for Black audiences. According to Donald Bogle, the "cultural rootlessness" exhibited in Goldberg's films serves to alienate her from Black audiences (297). So, what white audiences view as a race break and as "refreshing" characterizations of Goldberg, Black audiences tend to view as a convenient absence and a deliberate and debilitating reshaping of Blackness to make it negotiable for mainstream film audiences. Perhaps Goldberg represents the way white audiences feel Blackness ought to be--amiable, humorous, non-threatening and ready to facilitate.

In Jacqueline Bobo's *Black Women as Cultural Readers*, she explores the responses of Black women to the ways they are presented on screen. She quotes Julie Dash, the director of *Daughters of the Dust*, "As a black woman," states Julie Dash, "you take for granted that you are never going to see certain moments--certain private moments--on screen" (161). Julie Dash is articulating the frustration that Black women

experience when presented dehumanizing images of themselves on screen. In general, Black people are so used to the cardboard caricatures that they have all but given up hope of seeing complex, comprehensive and undiminished images of themselves on screen--especially in Hollywood films. For the majority of Blacks, Goldberg does not represent a place where insufficient representation is satisfied.

Lola Young re-emphasizes this point in her critique of the kinds of roles, the ways in which Black people are allowed to appear on screen. Using Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, Young speaks to the historical use Africa and everything relating to the African continent, as the space wherein whites could play out their fantasies. Young writes that:

As the embodiment of those fantasies, Black people have been expected to behave, respond and experience in particular ways: we are 'obliged' to play particular roles. In the case of most 'white' authored fictional narratives this means being confined to specific spheres of action. (176)

Perhaps the new "dark continent" is the screen. Film may represent the latest space wherein the dominant culture can carry out their fantasies against Blacks and other people of color. By allowing only Whoopi Goldberg (someone who can successfully carry off the mammy) into the eschelons reserved for Hollywood stars, Hollywood indeed makes a statement concerning when Blacks will be allowed centrality on the silver screen.

Even when mainstream film critics recognize the mammy quality inherent in Goldberg's characters, they tend to scapegoat her talent rather than yield a full critique of Goldberg as mammy. For instance, in Tania Modleski's *Feminism Without Women*, she examines several movies where Black women character's appear to further the narrative including *Ghost* and *Clara's Heart*. Modleski says,

I must acknowledge, however, although it places me in an uncomfortable position, that I personally find the Goldberg character in the comedies both attractive and empowering . . . and part of this attraction for me lies in the way she represents a liberating departure from the stifling conventions of femininity. (133)

Just as Stuart sees Goldberg as representing a hiatus for white audiences from thinking about their complicity in prevailing race equations, Modleski reads Goldberg as a break

from conventional femininity. Both methodologies rely on a festive/fictive readings of Goldberg to further their causes. They forego looking at race and womanhood from a perspective that allows Goldberg to be the only Black woman on screen or the only Black person in the movie. Because Goldberg is still the latest embodiment of the mammy, there is little room for a liberating reading of her either in terms of race or gender.

Clara's Hart is the 1988 movie starring Goldberg and Neil Patrick Harris. Goldberg is a Jamaican maid hired to take care of young David Hart. David has just suffered the loss of his baby sister and is continually ignored by parents on the brink of divorce. David is left to his own devices in suburban Maryland until the arrival of Clara Mayfield (Whoopi Goldberg). Clara has already worked her special brand of "black magic" on David's mother, hence her new job. While recuperating in Jamaica from the death of her baby, Mrs. Hart is restored to life herself by Clara. Mrs. Hart has spent days in her ocean side bungalow, with the shades drawn, alternating between the bathtub and bed until Clara arrives to clean the room. Clara does immediately what Mr. Hart, whom is present but invisible in Jamaica, cannot do. Before she leaves Mrs. Hart has cried in her arms and offered Clara a job. Upon arriving at the Hart house Clara again begins to breathe life into this dead family. She not only invigorates Mrs. Hart and David, but her constant fights with Mr. Hart even bring him to life.

Clara's patois laden speech and her long dread locks stand in direct contrast to the Hart's upper-class suburban world. She implements changes in their routines, the food they eat, and even decrees when it is time for Mrs. Hart to dismantle the dead baby's nursery. Yet, it is the changes that are wrought in David which are the focal point of the movie. Of course, David does not like Clara at first, which sets up the tug-of-war they must endure to get to know one another. David is not used to adult attention, unless it is in the negative. He has grown accustomed to spending his time trying to be helpful to his mother and athletic for his father in order that they might pay him some attention.

If the identifying characteristics of a mammy include the nurturing of white children and alienation from one's own community, then *Clara's Hart* is the perfect vehicle. Yet, not only is Clara Mayfield David Hart's mammy, her body becomes the space he uses to work through his own awakening desires and assent into manhood. She is his primary source of nurture and his first love, and he in exchange becomes her surrogate son.

After a rocky start Clara and David eventually become the best of friends. Their relationship moves even beyond the typical servant/young charge relationship as Clara begins to take him with her even on her weekends off. Clara becomes very much the mythical wise-Black-mother kind of character. The only person in house immune to her charms is the father and even he cannot fire Clara--though he tries. Clara's

relationship with the father is depicted as volatile perhaps in order to deny any competition between father and son for her affections. Even her contact with David's mother begins to wane as Mrs. Hart becomes the patient/close friend of a psychologist seeking to heal her inner-child. This leaves Clara and David plenty of time to be alone.

One of the unique aspects of this movie is that Clara though a new immigrant from Jamaica, does have friends in the area. During her weekends off she takes a train into Baltimore and visits old friends who have also come from Jamaica. Yet the trope of the mammy is at work even though Clara has Black friends. She is still an outsider within the Black community. There is secret about Clara Mayfield that causes her to be the subject of songs and the brunt of jokes. It is this secret that David Hart sets out to discover.

Upon visiting with Clara in the city, David meets a young Jamaican woman who threatens him with Clara's secret. Of course this mysterious young woman coupled with the fact that Clara carries around a small red suitcase which everyone else is forbidden to touch only exacerbates David's curiosity. Eventually David opens Clara's suitcase and discovers a bundle of letters that have been sent back to her unopened, seemingly by her husband. Clara's has only mentioned her own family in passing. She says she had a son whom she lost and that her husband works outside of Jamaica, but that he will be joining her in American soon. David's opening of the suitcase symbolizes his betrayal of Clara and

his crossing into manhood. The red suitcase like a scarlet letter, not only contains the remains of Clara's family, but her shame. Clara has spent the majority of the movie doling out wisdom and advice, sharing her anecdotes and raising David. The letters in the suitcase tell of her own failure as a wife and mother to her own family. Her husband will not accept her letters because he blames her for what happened to their son. It is clear that Clara also blames herself.

During Clara and David's final jaunt into the city, the Jamaican girl Dora and Clara collide. Dora tries to tell David what happened to Clara's son and in so doing grabs David and holds him by his hair. Clara responds by telling her to take her hands off her boy. Dora taunts Clara by telling her she has no boy, that her boy died, and a fight ensues. After returning to Clara's apartment David learns the whole of Clara's secret. The audience understands why she is an outsider among her own people and why she had so vehemently declared David "her boy." The scene wherein Clara reveals her secret to David is among the most poignant in the movie. They are seated at a table with David on the left and Clara on the right. The camera remains on David's face as Clara shares with him her awful pain. Clara's son who was in some way mentally challenged, raped the young girl Dora. When Clara confronted her son about it, he then attacked and raped his mother. The tale ends with her son Ralphy having committed suicide by throwing himself off a cliff. During the entirety of this heart-wrenching story the camera remains the

entire time on the young white actor. We see the play of his emotions and how he is handling Clara's revelation. After a brief cut to a frame that includes them both, we again see only the boy's reaction to the story, not Clara's telling. This is significant in relegating her once again to the position of mammy. While the movie has seemingly revolved around Goldberg's character, at the most crucial moment in the film she is simply a voice off-screen providing fodder for the young white male's consumption.

Once David learns Clara's secret there is a change that takes place in him. Clara's attention, love and finally her revelation is the catalyst he needs to enter manhood. David, who has struggled the entire movie with his status as a pushover, suddenly challenges his school's bully to a race in the swimming pool. With his father watching, David emerges from the pool triumphant having finally won the respect of his father and his peers. None of this takes place however, until David learns Clara's secret. It is as if he needed to take the one last piece of her that was solely hers. The transformation that takes place in David is not only the result of his taking her secret, but also of his taking the place of both Clara's son and her husband. He becomes the man in her life. David comforts Clara and reassures her that what happened was not her fault, he is successful because he has become "her boy." The mammy is reinforced here again as one of her characteristics is the abandonment of her own family in favor of a white one. Clara seemingly gives up the bond

with her son, not because he is dead or did wrong, but because the wonderful David has finally come to take his place. She even receives the comfort that was not forthcoming from her husband, as evidenced by the letters he returned to her, at the hands of David. Once again, the white family has proven itself preferable to the Black family.

It is important to note that stereotypes of Black men as beasts are confirmed. Clara's son not only rapes a young woman, but also his own mother committing the ultimate violation between a mother and son. Thus, it is the white child David who is able to provide Clara with a proper son. It is ironic that Clara ends up saving David from Dora whereas she did not save Dora from her own son. Clara has carried around a red suit case containing letters as evidence of her rejection by her husband. David opens the suitcase and exposes the secrets and eventually is able to comfort Clara in lieu of a husband who was unwilling. Thus the mammy is justified in her pursuit of the white family, in her pursuit of a white son/man. David is able to do single-handedly what Clara's son and husband were not.

Yet this tender moment between David and Clara cannot last. The white child cannot truly belong to her. A break must occur in their relationship to ensure that Clara does not really usurp the places held by a white mother/woman. David's reaction to the news that Clara will not continue to care for him after his parents divorce, serves as the breaking point in their relationship. After all the two have

shared, after Clara has stood in as his mother when his mother was unable/unwilling, David hurts Clara in the one way he knows he can. As Clara is explaining to David that she loves him even though they will no longer be together, he retaliates by saying "you'll just be a nigger in the end." David resorts to racial slurs in order to hurt Clara because she will no longer be at his disposal, he will no longer own her.

David's calling Clara a nigger is the first sign of racial tension between their characters. Throughout the film David reacts to Clara and her culture by imitating it. He imitates the way she talks, the way she worships at church. Each event he experiences with Clara is new and wonderful to him. He lives for the first time, vicariously, through Clara. Declaring that she turned out to be just a nigger implies that David thought Clara was exceptional. In his mind she was somehow different from other Black people because he was able to care for her. In essence, he brands her with his words, pushes her back down to the status of mammy. Because she has refused him his request (coming with her and her mother), he has no more use for her. As Clara leaves, David does not say good-bye to her and she is again carrying her red suitcase.

The movie does not end here however, but must redeem David's character and allay any notion of racism. A young man is seen walking into a hospital at the end of the movie. We see that it is David Hart and he is both diegetically and in reality a year or perhaps more older. He is much taller and

has shed his glasses and many other signs of boyhood. At the hospital, he asks where he can find Clara and is pointed in the direction of the children's ward. He finds Clara surrounded by children, leading them in Jamaican songs. When she sees David, she identifies him to the children as the one she has talked about. She describes the young man before her as the "remains of the boy" she knew. As Clara and David begin their reunion there is a awkwardness between them. He is no longer her "boy," and she is no longer his servant. They find it difficult to meet one another as adults.⁶ After a brief apology from David, they shake hands. The awkwardness that is apparent between them is even more prominent when they embrace. Yet Clara tells him that the bond they share is "perfect and more powerful than blood." Clara nearly pushes David away, dismisses him. Her words do nothing to alleviate the distance between them. Yet, it is a distance not entirely of their own making. Clara and David may still care for one another but there is no place for their relationship. She after all is not his mother, and he is too old for a mammy. Their reunion ends quickly and the last shot is of Clara standing in the window looking longingly after David as he leaves.

It is impossible to overlook to power of Goldberg's acting or the excellence of this particular script. Yet, *Clara's Hart* does what Goldberg's other obvious mammy films

⁶ It is interesting to note here that typically and traditionally the only kind of legitimate relationship that existed between white men and Black women was that of master and servant.

do, and that is leave the hard questions unanswered. The movie does not address why David and Clara seem resigned to the fact that their friendship is at best a memory at the end of the movie. As David leaves, it is obvious that they will not continue their relationship. Clara even tells David that if he never sees her again, he will always have a special place in her heart. Mainstream audiences are content with David's long overdue apology and enthused by the fact that he is now appears to be a man. However he is a man who has no room in his life for a Black woman. Clara has done her job by helping David come to fruition and now she must find others to nurture. It is significant that David does not find Clara remarried, reunited or with a family of her own. She is in the children's ward of a hospital, teaching white children Jamaican songs. Clara is still in the business of nurturing/healing other people's children.

The other obvious mammy movie is 1994's *Corrina, Corrina*. This movie has Goldberg as a maid once again. This time her protégés is a little white girl who has lost her mother. The surprising aspect about this movie is that Goldberg's character gets to have a romantic relationship with the girl's father. Yet, what seems a major departure from the mammy role ends up taking the audience on a deceptively circular ride.

Corrina Washington is an African-American college graduate who cannot get a job. In order to survive financially, she must take a job as a maid. Her dream is to

write articles for music magazines. She comes to be employed by Ray Liotta's character Manny, because she is the only one who has gotten a response from his daughter since her mother died. Molly has stopped talking and of course it will require the special attention of a Black woman before she regains her voice. Corrina is able to do what the child's father, grandparents and her father's potential girlfriend could not. She helps Molly come to terms with her mother's death.

Like *Clara's Hart* the parent figure in the movie is so busy he cannot provide adequate attention to the child. Goldberg's character again has access to her community but is not a complete part of it. Like the historical mammies, Clara and Corrina float in and out of their community, recognized and greeted, but still at the margins. Like Clara, Corrina is able to expose her charge to the Black community. Molly gets to frequent a Blues club, sing in the children's choir of a Black church, and plait her hair. Molly begins to imitate Corrina and even has fantasies of Corrina becoming her new mother. All of this happens in the presence of her father who seems oblivious to the goings on.

Unlike *Clara's Hart*, Corrina does have family in this film. She even lives with her sister, brother-in-law, and their children. The children become Molly's playmates, while their mother becomes increasingly concerned for Corrina. She warns Corrina after Manny buys her a gift, that he can only want one thing from a Black woman. Corrina's sister also reminds her that she needs to settle down with a nice man

(African-American) and have children. The impetus is that Corrina will end up an old maid if she does not stop finding fault with her suitors and preferring the company of her employer. The movie is careful to paint a picture of Manny as the obvious suitor for Corrina. Manny is the only one who understands Corrina's love of music. Corrina's sister scolds her for buying yet another music album, but it is the gift from Manny. So that while they do not agree on God, cannot live in the same neighborhood, or even dine out together without causing a spectacle, they do love the same kind of music. What more could a couple need to have in common. The audiences is lead to believe that their mutual love of music and Molly is enough to sustain them.

Of particular interest here is the parallelism in terms of religion between *Clara's Hart* and *Corrina, Corrina*. One of the defining characteristics of a mammy, according to Bogle, is a strong sense of spirituality. In both movies there are scenes where the white children go to church with the Goldberg characters. David Hart partakes in his first communion and Molly sings in a gospel choir. The final scene of *Corrina, Corrina* finds Molly comforting her grandmother at the loss of her grandfather by singing "This Little Light of Mine." In both films the children's only exposure to spirituality comes from the Goldberg characters. These brushes with God prove invaluable to both children's progress. It is significant that their introduction to spirituality does not come via their parents, who themselves

are in need of Clara/Corrina's guidance when it comes to these matter. However, in both movies this seemingly elevated place the mammy figure has in the life of the children is constantly under attack. In *Clara's Hart*, David's father is constantly reminding anyone who will listen that Clara is not David's mother and that their relationship has become too interdependent. The same reality check occurs in *Corrina, Corrina* as Manny reprimands Clara by reminding her that she is not Molly's mother and has no right to make major decisions concerning her. Again the Goldberg character's status as catalyst for character development is just that. Manny subsequently fires Corrina for making a decision about Molly without consulting him. This relegates her once again to servant status although she has been performing the role of mother, and to a certain extent wife. The mammy's deep spirituality is only honored and required as long as it does not interfere with the white parents' ideology.

While the mother in *Clara's Hart* is aided in her spiritual development by Clara, she only finds complete fulfillment as the patient and lover of a psychologist. In *Corrina, Corrina*, the father's source of spiritual connection is Corrina. The film is a rarity in the Goldberg collection as it features one of her few on screen romances. Corrina gets to be touched and kissed by Molly's father. In the process she touches not only his physical body, but his spiritual self. The end of the film finds this declared atheist praying for his and Corrina's "relationship" to be

restored. Like Mrs. Hart and David, Molly and her father are ushered into a new spiritual realm via the exposure they have to their mammies. In both of these films Goldberg's characterizations do what the mammy has always traditionally done, they give their whole selves to their white family, even their souls. The Goldberg characters, like the real mammies before them, bring a kind of "black" magic into the lives of their white families. No where is this more apparent than Corrina's magical ability to make red lights turn green and mute children speak.⁷

Another significant factor in *Corrina, Corrina* is the time period of the movie. It seems to be the late 1950's or early 60's. This, in and of itself, is a daring move on the part of the filmmakers because they are portraying interracial love during a time of particular racial unrest. It has not become accepted to date interracially at this time. Yet, this boldness is precisely one of the reasons the movie's premise does not work. It is difficult to believe a white man in middle-class society during this time period, would risk an open relationship with a Black maid. Even in the wake of his wife's death, and his daughter's obvious love for Corrina, the storyline seems implausible. The audience is left to wonder if the couple will ever really become a couple. Although Manny does go to Corrina's house at the end of the film to "get her back." She stops him from kissing her

⁷ Here I want to reiterate that I am not blaming Goldberg for the kinds of roles she garners, but rather I am pointing out that the most successful Black actress in Hollywood plays these kinds of roles.

outside on the porch because she has to "live in the neighborhood." When they return to his home, his mother (who has been the only one to really question the future of their relationship) is being comforted by Molly after the death of her husband. The car with Manny and Corrina pulls up to the front of the house, they emerge and walk over to Molly and her grandmother at the start of the credits. None of the questions concerning what will happen between them are answered. The closest the filmmakers can come to a happy ending is Manny and Corrina standing together on a porch. While of course films do not have to resolve every conflict, this movie misses an opportunity to push the envelope. It bypasses the opportunity to push Corrina out of the category of mammy and into the post of woman. We do not see Manny actually choose Corrina, we just hope that he does. The ending of a film that has set itself up to make a major statement about interracial relationships simply decides to leave it open.

Another film which finds Goldberg caring for a white child is the poorly rated *Bogus*. In this effort Goldberg is again paired with a white man (Gerard DePardieu) but not really. DePardieu is literally bogus, an imaginary friend created by yet another white child who has lost a parent. In 1996's *Bogus* Whoopi Goldberg inherits the child of her foster sister after the woman is killed in a car accident. *Bogus* is more reminiscent of *Clara's Hart* not only because the children in question are boys but because there is a healing

that must go on in Goldberg's character as well. In *Bogus*, Harriet Franklin is an extreme realist. She has no imagination and is only concerned with expanding her restaurant supply business. It will require the intervention of the little boy Albert and his friend Bogus for Harriet to be restored. Again, the Goldberg character is removed from the Black community, and although quite engaging, she is missing her usual spiritual connection. It will be the child who is able to restore Goldberg's zest for life in this scenario.

Yet, Goldberg's film persona is so overwhelming that it is unbelievable that she has no interests outside of work. The audience is given a sketchy history wherein Goldberg's disallusionment is explained away by having to be reared as a foster child. Whatever the circumstances that took her from her family have left her driven, cranky and lacking a sense of humor. Perhaps the film's apparent failure lies in the fact that it is almost impossible to imagine Goldberg without a sense of humor. The connection that existed between Clara and David is missing between Harriet and Albert. It is difficult to believe Albert can renew Harriet's verve for life.

Bogus seeks to invert the mammy formula by having magic restored to the life of the main character via a child. While in most of her other vehicles Goldberg possesses the secret of joy, here she is scripted as having lost it. Harriet Franklin does not laugh, or even have a social life. When she

is invited to her banker's son's birthday party, she practically ruins the occasion because she does not want to volunteer with the magician. When she first picks up Albert from the airport she tries to assuage his fears by telling him she is a alien from outer-space come to eat him. The audience is further alerted to the kind of lessons Goldberg will have to learn from the child through her conversation with the airport employee assigned to safeguard Albert. After lecturing Harriet about being late the woman introduces Albert as the little magician to Harriet. She tells Harriet that not only is he a magician but that his specialty is turning the "ace of spades into the queen of hearts." Immediately Goldberg is set up as the person who will need saving from herself.

As the film progresses, the audience learns that Albert has created an imaginary friend who will accompany him to Harriet's house. Bogus rides in the back seat of the car and stands at the end of the dinner table, dictating to Albert what he should say to Harriet. Harriet's true test, her decision to imagine, will culminate when she is asked to see Bogus herself. When Harriet finally consents to see him she is again a little girl who believes in dreams and fairy tales. Goldberg and Bogus even dance together in an imitation of Astaire and Rodgers. Harriet is no longer wearing her asexual business attire but a flowing white gown and high heels. As she spins in the middle of her living room she is tranformed into her fantasy, a stand in for Ginger Rodgers.

Once Harriet comes back to reality she must rescue the sleep walking Albert from the roof of their building. Albert has imagined that he is ascending a latter to meet his mother, while Bogus rushes to prevent him. But, it is Harriet who must prevent Albert from choosing a fantasy world rather than reality. Thus, once again the mammy figure ends up providing the white child with needed nourishment. This time, however she provides reality rather than magic.

As with most of Goldberg's other films race is mentioned only in passing. When Harriet first receives the call that her foster sister is dead and that she must take charge of the child, Harriet's first response is "I assume he's white." Albert's mother's best friend who is also Black (played by Sherly Lee Ralph) responds that Albert's mother would be upset is she knew Harriet thought that "Black gets in the way." In the context of the conversation between Harriet and the friend, which takes place over the phone, it would seem that it would have been white that gets in the and way not Black. While this comment is never explained it is the only time their perspective races are mentioned. Even when Goldberg registers the little white boy for school and even when she introduces him to her banker, who is also Black, race is never presented as a factor again.

At the end of the film Harriet and Albert are seen as having bonded as they stand at his mother's grave with flowers. Harriet is again dressed in a long, white dress, complete with a hat covered with flowers. This is a far cry

from the two piece suits she has worn throughout the film. Her dress is meant as a signal that she has softened, has a sense of humor, an imagination, has regained her own spiritual approach to life. The bogus character addresses the camera and bids the audience fairwell. The last shot is of him finding another little boy who needs an imaginary friend.

Bogus is probably the most disappointing of the films that blatantly use the mammy trope because like *Corrina*, *Corrina* there is much untapped potential. In *Bogus* the white parental force has been removed. Harriet is the sole guardian of little Albert. Yet the majority of the film focuses on her lack of maternal abilities as far as Albert is concerned, not what she can provide.

The last two movies that this sections examines and labels vehicles for Goldberg's mammying are *Sister Act* and its sequel. *Sister Act* was a phenomenally successful movie for Goldberg. This is the consummate role for her as mammy because she brings her special brand of magic to a convent full of nuns. As a Las Vegas showgirl running from her mobster ex-boyfriend, she takes refuge in a nunnery. While there this new "sister" brings a bit of life to the nuns. She takes them to a bar, teaches them to sing and eventually gets them a record deal. This is all in a days work for the mammy of the nineties.

Again, Goldberg is removed from relationships in the Black community. Although her backup singers and the police officer who helps protect her are Black, they are clearly

peripheral characters. Sister Mary Clarence's purpose in this film is to bring spice to the life of the nuns. One need only look at the movie poster of Goldberg in a nun's habit, wearing sunglasses and red high-heeled shoes to evaluate her role at the convent. Sister Mary Clarence's power is made all the more apparent in *Sister Act II*. The nuns must call on the Goldberg character to help them tame a rowdy bunch of inner-city kids. Sister Mary Clarence returns to the nuns, this time from a successful Las Vegas act, to become a music instructor at the school the nuns now run. Ironically, it is the same school Mary Clarence/Deloris Van Cartier attended as a child. The nuns ask her to breathe on the young people in the same way she did the nuns. Of course Sis. Mary Clarence is able to answer their prayers after she wins the respect of the kids. She does what she did in the original movie and turns them into a choir. They are so spectacular that they win a state competition and save their school which was in danger of closing.

Sister Act II is different in that most of the young people in the choir are Black or Hispanic. The principle choir member is a young Lauren Hill whose mother (again played by Sheryl Lee Ralph) does not want her to sing. Mary Clarence must not only turn the kids into a choir but convince the Lauren Hill character to pursue her dream. The potential for a relationship between the Hill character and Mary Clarence is never quite realized. While they eventually come to respect one another, they spend most of the film

competing for attention. So that a relationship between them never fully materializes. Again while mainstream audiences are apparently happy, many Black movie goers are left wondering if Goldberg will ever be relieved of her duties as a mammy.

Sister Act I and II again adhere to the formula denoting the appropriation of the mammy. In each of these films, like the ones mentioned previously, the characters Goldberg's portrays are able to endear themselves to audiences because they follow a formula. This formula allows the Black woman to appear in the role of a nurturer/servant/helper/catalyst and never in a way that forces alternate and perhaps unfamiliar and uncomfortable readings of her. Goldberg seems to be the most successful Black actress via visibility and marketability in Hollywood because she is easily consumed by her crossover audience. The roles she plays are in keeping with the preferred societal view of Black women overall. Black women occupy limited media spaces loaded with monumental socio-political connotations. Goldberg is rarely seen as a Black mother to Black children, and never seen in relationships with Black men because that would require a full and complex depiction of her, thus a full and complex reception. Goldberg is successful in the realm where she is, because the mammy is both what Hollywood and their audiences choose to want.

While there are several other movies, like *Ghost*, *Soap Dish*, *Boys on the Side*, and *Moonlight and Valentino* where

Goldberg definitely engages in the role of mammy for the white characters; they are discussed later. The films mentioned in this Chapter are among Goldberg's most blatant attempts at nurturing the white characters and follow the most traditional manifestations of the mammy. The criticism that labels Whoopi Goldberg an actress whose success comes primarily from playing roles that mimic mammying are true. Even at this point in history, the film industry is still most likely to create roles for Black women, or one Black woman, wherein her major purpose is to nurture white characters.

CHAPTER 2
THE TROPE OF THE LOCK

Gazing at Black Women's Bodies

And now, something even more stupid, she's running around with goddamn blue contact lenses in her eyes, telling everybody that she has blue eyes. And that's sick . . . to me. I hope people realize, that the media realize, that she's not a spokesperson for black people, especially when you're running around with motherfucking blue contact lenses telling everybody that your eyes are blue.

Spike Lee
Harper's Magazine 1987

Hollywood has found it difficult at best to depict multi-dimensional representations of Black women. Hollywood, and films in general, have been guilty of either presenting her as overtly sexed, or they have desexed the Black woman completely. Their idea of negotiating the loaded meanings inherent within the Black female body is to try and subvert her racial connotations or revert to simple and archetypal presentations. However, it is always with questions of her sexuality that Hollywood seems to have the most trouble. This chapter "looks" at Whoopi Goldberg (and Black Women in general) and her relationship to the camera as well as her relationships with and to her audiences. This chapter also explores the physical presentation of Goldberg, aspects of

femininity and sexuality as they apply, and what this conveys about those who reject, accept or produce her image.

Cinematically, as well as socially and politically, sex(uality) and Black women have always been a volatile combination. In order to examine Goldberg's screen image as a woman and as a Black person, it is necessary to examine how Hollywood has imbued her with or stripped her of sexual and feminine qualities.

Much of early feminist film theory takes as its point of critical departure an analysis of the "male gaze." Critique and discussions have focused on the way in which this omnipotent male gaze objectifies woman. Jane Gaines marks Laura Mulvey's "Visual Representation and Narrative Cinema," as one of the first essays to demonstrate from which "the feminist commitment to revealing the patriarchal assumptions behind cinematic language" (199). Mulvey's emphasis on the "woman as image," "spectacle," and her "to-be-looked-at-ness" summons images of woman caught within a bright, white light that emanate from the patriarchal psyche, via the camera(750). Once loosed, this metaphorical light impales the woman in its flood, simultaneously defining, fragmenting and fetishizing her. However, this construct assumes that "women" are white, as it does not take into consideration what happens to the Black woman's body within the patriarchal gaze.

As white women are occupied critiquing their way out of the trajectory of the objectifying gaze, Black women are left

to address their peripheral position as subjects of the gaze. Trapped in the shadows outside of the gaze, the Black woman is certainly the beneficiary of "left-over" looks. Whatever emphasis is left over from a gaze that objectifies the white woman subjects the Black woman to its refractions/remains. Remnants of the gaze that do not adhere to the white woman, deposit themselves on the body of the Black woman. She is left with everything that remains in relation to the gaze. This results in the Black woman being over and outside the adoring aspects of the gaze, but as the over-emphasized, the over-done, the over-emulated and overwhelmingly stereotypical depictions of Black women. These stereotypes have lives of their own. Usually, if seen at all, Black women are presented as caricatures. Thus the gaze as feminist film theory proposes it often renders the Black woman's image stereotypical, it leaves her out and/or alone.

Given the popularity and the magnitude of her work, the Black body of Whoopi Goldberg would seem the obvious site for the nexus between surplus looks and fully rendered, multi-dimensional presentations. However Goldberg's body as films re-present it, has been relieved of any such burden. In Goldberg, it is possible to see what happens to the sexless Black female whose filmic image is continually presented and consumed, yet remains emptied of all sexual significance.

Body Spaces

Goldberg's film presence as a (non)sexual entity is predicated on her dark complexion and her gender. However, before examining the reproduction of Goldberg on screen as a (non)sexual being it is necessary to do what the camera does--look at her physical body. Most of the time when a Black woman is looked at by the camera, whether in motion picture or on television, she is like foreign matter in the lens. For instance, Susan Dworkin, writing for Ms. Magazine, described her as "a graceful black woman with ebullient teeth and hands like happy birds" (12). Goldberg's dark complexion conjures up animalistic and savage imagery that reflect the myths about Blackness in Western societies. Blackness has always been equated with deficiencies of mental, emotional and social capacities as well as the absence of light. In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Franz Fanon refers to the awareness of Blackness not just as a skin color, but as a discourse as "racial epidermal schema" (112). There are inferences and ramifications that exist because of the simple presence of black skin. To be Black is to automatically have insinuations and hypotheses constructed about your character and family history. According to Fanon:

I was responsible at the same time for my body, for my race, for my ancestors. I subjected myself to an objective examination, I discovered my blackness, my ethnic characteristics; and I was battered down

by tom-toms, cannibalism, intellectual deficiency, fetishism, racial defects, slave-ships, and above all else, above all: "Sho; good eatin'." (112)

Fanon articulates the baggage that his skin alone as a signifier contains. Fanon is both self-conscious and socially conscious of all the meanings expressed in his flesh. He pens the above passage in response to the countless times a white person had looked at him and exclaimed, "Look, a Negro!" (112). This dictum not only makes him obvious but defines him as well. Fanon is not known to the people who name him; their "recognition" occurs solely on the basis of his perceived character based on his skin pigmentation. If this then is some sort of truth and Blackness acts as a universal exposition then any film can make use of this and play on racist premises.

This meaning attached to Black skin is perhaps part of the reason for the continued success of an actresses like Goldberg. Since film is the very act of privileging the visual, any subject which comes into contact with the camera is submitted to intense scrutiny. One's clothes, hair, and skin color all function as discourses. The camera's scrutiny functions in collaboration with the viewer, but is infinitely more powerful. Long after the original viewers are gone, film remains tenacious and repeatable. Given this kind of potency, it is important to look closely at films that feature Goldberg. It is not accidental that she is the most prolific actress in Hollywood, nor can Goldberg's success be credited

entirely to her talent, though it is phenomenal. The combination of fortune, talent and all the racial/gendered connotations she embodies and/or erases, as a *Black* woman, contribute to her achievement.

One can add to Fanon's theories concerning the presumptuous meanings associated with Blackness, those associated with Black femaleness. It is then possible to explain why Goldberg has managed to become so successful. She is dark complexioned and even her hair evokes meaning. Goldberg's body, which is rarely given attention in her films, is not overly thin or muscled as is typical with female stars. Goldberg does not noticeably wear make-up. Her walk, mannerisms, and voice are often described as masculine (Stuart, 12). When Goldberg is discussed all of these discourses and physical body markers collide. There is no easy methodology to describe the spaces her physical body calls forth. Hers is a physique Hollywood cinema usually avoids when casting the female stars of their movies. Yet, Goldberg has managed to be the most successful Black woman in Hollywood film. She is a site filled with contradictions. She is the physical epitome of a Black woman for mainstream film audiences.

The widely accepted connotations about Blacks as put forth by the media seem to fill the body of Whoopi Goldberg. However, on further examination her dark complexion, her natural hair, and other attributes that stereotype Black women, become pantomimes. They signify the body of Black

women, but are emptied of their potency. Goldberg is physically a Black woman but is often stripped of family, community, politics, voice, personal sexuality and anything that positions her socially and culturally as Black, female, and human. This is precisely why Hollywood finds itself enamored of her. Hollywood performs a slight of hand, in this case a camera trick. It takes Blackness as a signifier and provides it with meaning by working in opposition to some stereotypes, like that of undue sexuality. Yet Hollywood embraces others, like the supernurturing Black mammy. This multiplication of some types and negation of others culminates in a palatable adaptation of Blackness. Whoopi Goldberg is mainstream cinema's idea of the acceptable Black woman. She is usually clever, witty, friendly, unassuming and maternal. She does not conjure up images of a jezebel but rather the faithful servant/friend, who rarely has a child or a man of her own. In fact, this is an important part of her appeal. She lacks connection to any Black community.

Mainstream film audiences are comfortable knowing Goldberg and letting only a few like her into their space. One of the results of presenting the lone Black in a sea of whiteness is that whiteness does not have to abandon its comfort zone. Much of the mainstream film audience rarely has to deal with the reality of socio-political and economic imbalances based on race. They get to continue in their relative oblivion when they attend films or watch television. This lack of concern becomes patronage when film and

television add one or two Blacks and create images of multi-racial utopias.

Robert Stam in "Bakhtin, Polyphony and Ethnic/Racial Representation," calls this kind of visual representation "ethnic harmony." He writes:

One detects images of ethnic utopia on the "Oprah Winfrey Show," in soft-drink commercials, in public service announcement, and in the happily integrated and multiethnic big-city Eyewitness news shows.
(261)

Goldberg's movies and Stam's examples illustrate a multi-cultural fantasy. As she is often the single Black person in her films, white audiences are able to "experience" a small item of Blackness and avoid the excess Black baggage. They receive a scaled down version of the Black woman. For mainstream audiences, Blackness is devedined, declawed with only a Black shell remaining. bell hooks reiterates this thought in *Reel to Real*. She writes that, "white folks wanting to see and "enjoy" images of black folks on the screen is often in no way related to a desire to know real black people" (10). Thus, Goldberg's popularity cannot be summarily thought of as evidence of mainstream cinema audiences' desire to both see and know Black people.

Consequently, while Goldberg is readily received by mainstream audiences, she is often rejected by Black audiences. Black audiences do not see mainstream cinema's acceptance of Goldberg as a triumph--evidence that film and society are evolving. Black audiences often reject Goldberg

because for them, exhibiting a Black woman on screen involves more than the presence of the physical symbols. To present a Black woman on screen would mean to present a multi-dimensional characterization, not a stereotypical caricature.

The images of Goldberg that make her accessible to mainstream audiences are often the very things that make it difficult for her to be embraced by Black audiences. In "Making Whoopi," Andrea Stuart points to Goldberg's dress as the major point of contention between her and Black audiences. According to Stuart this tension between Goldberg and the Black community is about her appearance.

The sartorial has been one of the few mechanisms for negotiating social hierarchies within black communities, so it is no surprise that the person who has appeared on the list of America's worst-dressed women more times than virtually any other actor should provoke her community's ire. (12)

Stuart is attempting to make simple an incredibly complex relationship. The members of the Black community who have a problem with Goldberg are not necessarily interested in how she dresses in her films; rather they are concerned about the reasons she is so popular in Hollywood film. Black audiences seem to innately understand that Hollywood is both a reflection of society and a producer of popular culture. They understand that mainstream audiences, who are comprised mostly of the dominant culture, watch on the screen what they are comfortable thinking. Black audiences realize that Goldberg's popularity is in part a reflection of the dominant culture's mindset concerning Black people on the whole. Black

audiences are then apt to assume, based on the demand for Goldberg in film, that it entertains the dominant society to see a Black woman disconnected from her community, childless, loveless, void of sexuality, and ever willing to serve as friend, nurturer and even savior to her white contemporaries.

While Goldberg is Hollywood's favorite Black actress, she is by no means the only Black person allowed to act in Hollywood. Periodically, Hollywood is even fond of making "Black" movies. By Black here I refer to the rash of "gangsta flicks" produced by major Hollywood studios in the early 1990's, whose content and target audience was Black. Also, Hollywood began in the later half of this century to produce a rash of "Black" comedies whose themes include how to have a good time, how to date more women, and how to steal and not get caught--*Friday*, *How to Be a Player*, and *I Got the Hook Up*, etc. The Black community can also draw conclusions about the fact that these kinds of films are produced for Black audiences, virtually to the exclusion of any other kind of film thematically. While mainstream audiences enjoy amiable encounters with Blackness via Whoopi Goldberg, Black audiences are left to films depicting shootouts and Black comedians turned actors. The film fare for Black audiences still primarily consists of Black on Black crime and cameo appearances made by the Buffoon, the Whore and the Welfare Queen (OKazawa-Rey, 25).¹ Stuart and other critics who believe

¹I refer to movies like *New Jack City*, *Boys in the Hood*, *Menace to Society*, and *Straight Out of Brooklyn*. While all of these movies boast Black directors, their common theme is a lack of multidimensional roles for women and an abundance of Black men

that Black audience's problem with Goldberg (and Hollywood film as a whole) can be condensed to the clothes they wear on screen are missing a vital element in their analysis.

Black audiences are sophisticated in their ability to analyze the way Blackness is being presented. Historically, Black audiences have had their own bodies as training ground. Their ability to read these kinds of discourses enables them to draw conclusions when watching Hollywood cinema. Thus, it is quite easy to conclude that Hollywood presents Blackness to all audiences in ways that negate and/or control it.

Although the contention between Black audiences and Whoopi Goldberg cannot be simply reduced to clothing, an important aspect of this dissonance does hinge on appearance. In *Fear of the Dark*, Lola Young maintains that,

given the inscription of Otherness on the black body established through colonial and imperial anthropological, medical, literary and photographic discourse, it seems it was inevitable the cinema would become instrumental in the attempted demystification and control of black people. (50)

While film is an important element in the definition of all people, it is particularly adept at framing people of color. Therefore film becomes complicit both in the maintenance and production of current social, political and economic standards. Film produces meaning visually. Many Black

killing other Black men. Also, when I refer to Black movies I intentionally leave out the Richard Pryor/Eddie Murphy/Chris Rock/Chris Tucker kind of comedy. These movies, while featuring Black leading men, are more crossover in their intent. All of the actors mentioned above are or were paired with white actors to appeal to a broader audience.

audiences are visual experts, because they themselves have been subject to constant inspection and examination. They are acutely aware of Blackness as a visible discourse.

Lola Young contends that it is not possible to simply present a Black person on screen. The very presence or lack of Black people in a film speaks.

The question of images--their construction and their histories and the meanings which accrue to them--is central to a discussion of any visual text. When it comes to carrying out work which involves representations of black people, the analysis of images has a heightened political inflection, since representations of black people are always deemed to 'mean' something, to be laden with symbolism in regard to 'race' in racially stratified societies. (7)

Once again, this is evidence of how saturated Blackness is with meaning. It is almost impossible for the mere presence of Blackness not to mean anything. Black audiences are more aware of this than perhaps mainstream audiences. Black audiences are acutely aware of anything that looks like them (or not) on screen. The very nature of racial categories and hierarchies makes many members of Black audiences adept at reading their own imagery.

A great example of the ability of Blacks to police their own imagery is apparent in movies and novels that involve the tragic mulatto and their "passing" as white. Often the enemies of these characters are other mulattos or other Blacks. In Nella Larsen's *Quicksand and Passing*, and both the novel and screen versions of *Imitation of Life*, as well as Alex Haley's *Queen*, the light-skinned women who are passing

as white are afraid. They express concern that it will be someone of color who exposes their secret. Such cultural detective work can almost be second nature to people of color--in this case Black audiences. It is virtually inherent in them to look at the screen (and at life) in a way that asks "what did they mean by that?" As a result, many Black people look defensively at themselves on screen. Black audiences are often engaged in critique when they watch film, and it is different from the kind of critique implemented by mainstream audiences.

Christian Metz writes in "Language and Cinema" that film is a "pluricodic medium." He contends that while film has no "master code," it can be read as the result of an intermingling of "specific cinematic codes," (codes that appear only in the cinema) and "non-specific codes" which are shared with languages other than the cinema (Stam, Burgoyne, Flitterman-Lewis, 48). Many Black audiences are adept at reading non-specific codes mainly because Blackness as a signifier is often universal in its application. The treatment of Blackness in film often traverses class, language, culture etc. While mainstream audiences may be unaware of (or refuse to be aware of) the implications of constantly presenting Goldberg as the only Black person or the masculine Black woman in her films, Black audiences almost compulsively read this kind of coding. The ability to evaluate racial coding has historically been a survival strategy.

Black Women as Cultural Readers is Jacqueline Bobo's study of Black women and their reading of non-specific filmic codes in Spielberg's *The Color Purple* and Julie Dash's *Daughters of the Dust*. She interviews a group of Black women from varying social, political and economic groups. What she finds is a wealth of reflection and rumination on how Black women are presented in these films. She finds that while Black audiences do go to films for visual pleasure, diegetic construction often intrudes upon and interrupts that pleasure. Take for example these very different assessments of *The Color Purple*. According to Bobo:

One of the women expressed a feeling that was similar to one of the predominant criticisms by mainstream reviewers--that the novel was more "gritty," and Spielberg obscured its message by making the film look too nice. . . . [The woman says] "I thought, Damn, this man [Spielberg] is trying to say, "Oh, look, they had a rough life, but wasn't it pretty." I mean, look at all the purple flowers. . . . He romanticized it all the way through--and the music, it was that stereotypical old white romanticized music. (95)

None of the women Bobo interviewed were film critics, yet this woman, like all the women, were able to read the material in quite complex terms. While this woman was not particularly pleased with the images she saw re-presenting Black people in *The Color Purple*, another interviewee thought the prettiness of the film helped to soften the brutal reality of the text. Bobo writes:

I like the fact that it wasn't gritty. I think that if it had been gritty it would have been too much to handle. It was difficult to handle as it was . . . If it had been grittier it might have made that even more uncomfortable, or it might have made me back away from it so much that I couldn't feel it. . . . It would have been too ugly for me to watch. And I wouldn't have seen it (96).

Whether the reading is positive or negative, it is important to note these women's ability to negotiate this text in terms of how Blackness is re-presented. They seem used to navigating their imagery in very complex ways.

I don't mean to imply that every member of Black cinema audiences engages filmic text looking to decode images of themselves. Black audiences go to the cinema for the same reason other audiences do. They want to be entertained. Yet, given the historical and contemporary position of Blacks in this society, it is nearly impossible for them to avoid seeing some aspect of their controversial position duplicated on screen. As Stam writes in "Unspeakable Images,"

although it is true that complete realism is an impossibility, it is also true that spectators themselves come equipped with a "sense of the real" rooted in their own social experience, on the basis of which they can accept, question, or even subvert a film's representation (254).

Thus, whether Black audiences are actually aware of it or not, they bring their history and culture with them to a film, just as any movie-goer does. Black audiences must negotiate images of themselves on screen that are fraught

with meaning. They either read defensively, embrace what they see, or choose to ignore facets of a film altogether.

It is often easier for both Black and mainstream audiences to embrace the images that they see. According to Farah Jasmine Griffin encountering Blackness means having to look at or past a great deal of history. This is particularly difficult for Black people themselves. Griffith contends that conventionally when white people "examine black bodies "visual difference," "the color black," progresses to ugliness which progresses to inferiority" (520). If this progression from Black as ugly to Black as inferior is apt to take place in the mind of the mainstream audience, then the Black audience is no different. It becomes even worse for Black audiences because ugliness and inferiority are no longer just projected, but internalized. Black people often cope with the repercussion of such thinking by embracing it. Consequently, as Griffith also writes, Black people "are often complicit in maintaining standards [of beauty] that oppress them" (521).

In "Perceived Attractiveness, Facial Features and African Self-Consciousness," John W. Chambers Jr. and a team of Black psychologists write:

Historically, the hallmark of feminine beauty in American society is to have blond hair, blue eyes, and Caucasian features. This is the image that has been held up for all racial groups to admire . . . Western society conveys its concept of attractiveness primarily through the media, that is, television commercials, movies, magazine layouts of models, beauty pageants, commercial catalogs, and billboards. (306)

Given the media's continual bombardment of all audiences with notions of beauty, complicity seems the easiest coping mechanism.

It is not just the standards of beauty that Blacks begin to embrace, but cultural significations as well. Even Black audiences begin to adopt and want to see stereotypical images of themselves. Herb Boyd in "African-American Images on Television and in Film" concludes that Black people allow these kinds of presentations of themselves. For Boyd, Black people are so desperate to see anything that looks like them on screen that they often embrace demeaning imagery. Black people allow negative and degrading imagery because this is all they will get to see of themselves. Boyd writes that this is the basis for the popularity of a television show like *Martin*. He also sees the appetites of many Black audiences creating a market for movies that depict Black people as "thieves, pushers, prostitutes, gold-diggers and buffoons" (24-25). bell hooks addresses this acquiescence to stereotypical imagery by Black audiences in *Reel to Real*.

Often unenlightened black and other nonwhite groups who, like many whites, have been socially conditioned to accept denigrating portraits of black people are dissatisfied when they do not see these familiar stereotypes on screen. (74)

While hooks refers to Blacks who are comfortable with one-dimensional images as "unenlightened." It is important to reiterate that they have chosen to deal with the onslaught of

such imagery in in one particular way. The "unenlightened" ingest what they like and simply ignore what they don't. This would explain why images of Black men as drug dealers and Black women as sexual predators have been and remain financially rewarding for Hollywood to present to Black audiences. The same Black character who pushes drugs is often a kind of anti-hero. This kind of anti-hero sprang from the Blaxploitation era of film production. Characters like these took care of their mothers, looked out for young children in the neighborhood, and planned to marry their ladies after one last score. This anti-hero *takes* money, power, and respect because they will never be given to him, and he cannot never hope to earn them legitimately.

In the same vein, the heroine embraced by many Black audiences was often hypersexual. She is typified in Pam Grier's character of the 1970's, who used her body as a both a phycial and sexual weapon. Today Black women in film and television still use their bodies, but as pawns. They trade sex for money and affection because their bodies are all they own. As such, the Black audience's focus is on the fact that the heroine manages to acquire these goods and on her prerogative to see and use her body as she wishes.

While hooks' language seems elitist in evaluating the responses of Black audiences to themselves on screen, she does concede that if Black people want multi-dimensional depictions of themselves, then the answer is not to demand solely positive imagery. hooks says that:

Black audiences have wrong-mindedly believed that the push for more "positive" images would necessarily lead to diverse representations of blackness. Yet the very insistence on positive images automatically acts to constrict and limit what can be created. (105)

Here hooks is referring to the "enlightened" Black audiences, those who do not choose to welcome stereotypical images of themselves. Yet even she, like most marginalized audiences who ever attempt to watch film, adopts a particular way of seeing what she wants and closing her eyes to what she doesn't. According to hooks:

When I returned to films as a young woman, after a long period of silence, I had developed an oppositional gaze. Not only would I not be hurt by the absence of black female presence, or the insertion of violating representation, I interrogated the work, cultivated a way to look past race and gender for aspects of content, form and language. (204)

hooks is dangerously close to doing what the "unenlightened" audience does. She too understands the kind of gazing Black audiences and indeed, most "other" audiences have to undertake. She sees past Blackness as ugly, negative, inferior or absent so that she can engage the rest of the film.

Oftentimes for mainstream audiences, the challenge is different. White audiences are not always bogged down in cultural codes. When they watch a movie about a family in Idaho, they do not usually ask where are the Black people. Or if they watch a movie about a family in Idaho who have Black

neighbors, they do not ask themselves what are those Black people doing in Idaho. Usually when they watch apocalyptic and/or science fiction movies they don't have to wonder why space aliens don't ever kidnap Blacks, or why there are no Black people present at the end of the world. Nor do mainstream audiences question why it seems that white single-mothers in the movies like Michelle Phieffer and Sandra Bullock, are heroic divorcees, whereas Halle Berry has to play a single-mother who has never been married and who is also a crack addict. Not only is Berry a crack addict but she is a bad mother who leaves her baby in a dumpster for a white woman to rescue.² These are the kinds of questions that Black audience are more often than not, consciously or not, compelled to ask themselves.

While it is uncommon for mainstream film audiences and critics to question the presentation of Blackness on screen, it is not impossible. In *Cinema and Spectatorship*, Judith Mayne spends an entire chapter examining the implications of the Black presence in the films *Field of Dreams* and *Ghost*. She studies the way in which white audiences receive these two films wherein the pivotal characters, the characters who advance the narrative, are Black (James Earl Jones and Whoopi Goldberg, respectively). Mayne notes that the "negative reviews of *Field of Dreams*," see the James Earl Jones character as out of place. In the case of *Ghost* "race is rarely called to attention" (150). She contends that the

²Why do Fools Fall in Love, Hope Floats, Losing Isaiah

reviews of *Ghost* had very little comment about race, until it came to reviews of the home video. Mayne quotes a review by Ty Burr of the film *Ghost*, following its release on home video. Burr comments on the racial stereotyping of the Hispanic villain, and the use of Whoopi Goldberg as the "loudmouth con artist who makes her living scamming superstitious, eye-rolling black folk" (Mayne, 150). What is most worthy of note is Mayne's comment about Burr's review.

Burr's review has as much to do with how well the film stands up "with repeat viewings" as with how well it works in a movie theater, and it is interesting that the racist stereotypes should only become evident when the film is seen more than once. (150)

Mayne's contention is that Burr's negative review arises out repeated viewings of the film when it was accessible on home video. Burr had to watch the film repeatedly before he was able to read the racial codes inherent within it. Mainstream cinema audiences are not compelled to decipher racial codes, negotiate film images of Black people in the same way, with the same frequency, or intensity, as Black audiences. If Black audiences are constantly forced to question the film narrative and decode depictions of themselves, then the questioning session intensifies when Whoopi Goldberg is the star of the film.

Goldberg's status as a movie star carries with it expectations. Because she is usually the "star" of the film, it seems reasonable that she would be presented as a fully-developed character. Yet, Goldberg is rarely in romantic

relationships in her films, and when she is, never is she paired with a Black man. Neither is she allowed access to Black children. Instead, she plays the same wise, witty, tough, guardian-angel kind of character who does not need an identity that would shape her as woman, Black, or Black woman. The "lone (and lonely) ranger" quality in Goldberg that appeals to mainstream audiences is the very thing that makes her unpopular with Black audiences. Thus, for the most part, Black audiences are unable to celebrate Goldberg and her success because they do not recognize themselves in her. Goldberg lives in filmic worlds where race and sex are only passing issues, and perhaps this is one specific cinematic code not readily negotiated by Black audiences.

Body Boundaries

The social and cultural body of the Black woman, like all social and cultural presentations of the body, is difficult at best to assess. To simply point out that she has once again been stigmatized and stereotyped belabors the point. Yet, to advance critique it is often necessary to begin at the places where social and cultural misrepresentation is still occurring. One of the areas where the assessment of Goldberg as a Black woman and a successful actress in Hollywood is most intriguing is in regards to her sexuality. It is interesting to compare the way in which Hollywood has presented Goldberg as a largely androgynous being, while most of their other re-presentations of Black women and sexuality revert back to the trope of her as sexual savage.

The media still engages in the presentation of Black women as wildly, abnormally sexual. These tropes originate out of a need to control the Black woman's sexuality. One of the places the Black woman is most readily available for sexual consumption is in music videos. It is possible to consume images of Black women, via music television, as the over-sexed, "exotic primitive" on a daily basis. Whether she is parading across the screen in a bathing suit or underwear, draped across a bed, posed as different flavors of ice cream,

or performing a nineties version of the antediluvian "forbidden dance," sexually over-emphasized images of the Black woman are readily available. Audrey Edwards emphasizes the power music videos have in semiotically structuring the Black woman. She writes that "the videos are riddled with stereotypes . . . the notion of the Black woman as sex object--exotic, hot mamas ready to get it on at the drop of a hat" (220).

From the slave quarters to urban projects, Black women have been inculcated with depictions of themselves as extraordinarily promiscuous. Music videos are only the latest incarnation of Black women as sexual predators and savages. A more classic example of Hollywood's ability to fetishize the Black woman's body is found in the rash of Black movies from the 1970s, commonly known as "Blaxploitation" films.

Although this work centers primarily around Goldberg and Hollywood film's handling of her as a Black female star, it is useful to trace some of the ways they have exhibited other Black females in film. If the Black woman's first encounters with Hollywood film were as mammies and tragic mulattos, and the latest and most successful engagement is as Whoopi Goldberg, then certainly the Blaxploitation era represented a kind of filmic hiatus from the films featuring archetypal mammies and mulattos.

If nothing else, that period in Hollywood where there were actually two or three Black women starring in feature films, further points to Hollywood's discomfort with the

Black woman's body. Women like Pam Grier and Tamara Dobson reached momentary status as starlets. The difference however, between their reign and Goldberg's is audience and presentation. Goldberg is marketed toward mainstream film audiences whereas Grier, Dobson, and the like made movies targeted at Black audiences. Goldberg is constructed to be laughed at and sometimes with, but never so as to be desired. Blaxploitation movies featured Black actors and storylines intended primarily for Black audiences. However, Hollywood did not mind the added income from bored or curious members of the mainstream audience who attended these movies. Goldberg films usually feature a Black woman devoid of any cultural or social semblances of Blackness. Blaxploitation movies actually (supposedly) performed elements of Black culture. The common thread between these two types of films is Hollywood. They are how Hollywood chose to exhibit Blackness then and how it chooses to exhibit it now.³

In her book, *Black and White Media*, Karen Ross addresses Hollywood's sudden interest in producing "Black" movies in the 1970's.

³ I want to acknowledge that Hollywood does currently produce an occasional movie with a Black storyline. I am comparing Blaxploitation with Goldberg movies because Blaxploitation represented Hollywood's mass production period of such movies and Goldberg is the most prolific Black actor in film to date.

In an ideas-bankrupt Hollywood at the beginning of the 1970's, with white Americans leaving the cities in droves, it was hardly surprising that Hollywood looked to the success of Black produced films such as *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song* and *Super Fly* and jumped on the bandwagon with alacrity. (18)

Hollywood saw an opportunity to make money from a previously untapped audience. However, the Hollywood film industry is first and foremost a business. Once it recovered the mainstream audience, production of "Black" themed movies stopped. The silver screen did not consistently exhibit Black women in major roles again until Goldberg makes her debut in the late 1980's. Perhaps in part, Hollywood's reception of Goldberg is in part a backlash against the images they marketed during the Blaxploitation period, and the images that continue to be exhibited in the other facets of visual media.

Image Is Everything

Patricia Hill Collins labels the intertwinings of gender as biology and gender as sexuality, sexual politics (164). Since this work is intensely concerned not only with Goldberg's sexuality, but her race-gender and its presentation on screen, the exploration of sexual politics as it concerns Goldberg seems an adequate way of beginning critique.

Hill Collins grounds an understanding of sexuality in Foucaultian theory when she defines it as "socially

constructed through the sex/gender system on both the personal level of individual consciousness and interpersonal relationships and the social structural level of social institutions" (165). Thus sexuality in this work, as in Hill Collins, is an amalgam. It is inclusive of sex as biological determinant and sex as an individual and social construct. With this working definition in mind, it is possible to investigate the way in which Hollywood film *handles* the body of Whoopi Goldberg, and indeed the bodies of Black women in general.

Because of her history, and her present, the Black woman's body is loaded with sexual innuendo and connotations unique to her position. According to Hill Collins Black women are unique in the way in which they exhibit and the way in which society sees them as exhibiting sexuality. Hill Collins writes: "African-American women inhabit a sex/gender hierarchy in which inequalities of their race and social class have been sexualized" (165). Consequently a Black woman on screen, a Black woman anywhere, does not bear the meanings associated with being a woman, but those analogous to being a "Black woman." In film and the media in general, to be a Black woman means to be something less or something more than simply being a woman. The something less could be less feminine, even less human. The something more is usually negative in that she is more promiscuous or more nurturing to anyone outside of her own culture or family. The Black woman is often presented as the extreme. She is never represented

as just a woman because just being a woman typically means that she is white.

As I stated in the chapter on the mammy, one of the reasons for Goldberg's phenomenal appeal to mainstream audiences is the fact that she is simple to look at. She is usually presented as one element of a person. Goldberg is often a caricature of nurturing, wit, or charm and is easily managed by mainstream audiences. Thus, not only does Goldberg represent a way for mainstream audiences to encounter Blackness without guilt, she does not threaten established boundaries. Andrea Stuart writes that "in order to cross over it seems that Goldberg has had to jettison the loaded sexual exoticism usually associated with the black female performer, as well as any potential political disruptiveness" (13). Viewing Goldberg on screen does not require mainstream audiences to confront the sexuality of, or their possible sexual attraction to, a Black woman. Nor does their encounter with Goldberg require that they renegotiate the socio-economic and socio-political boundaries that are currently in place. Thus, Hollywood has capitalized on Goldberg primarily as a non-sexual being.

Mainstream audiences are comfortable with Goldberg because she is non-sexual, even asexual in her presentation. In a society that uses sex to sell everything from dentures to dog food this sudden aversion to sexuality is suspect. Jane Gaines writes in "White Privilege and Looking Relations: Race and Gender in Feminist Film Theory" that the Black

woman's sexuality represents a "special threat" because "its eruption stands for the aspirations of the Black race as a whole" (203). Neither the camera nor the audience sees the Black woman as a woman who happens to be Black, but as a Black who is a woman. As such, any revelation of her as a normal⁴ sexual being could denote her as a normal human being and automatically call subordinate treatment of her (and therefore all Black people) into question. Even Gaines' description of the Black woman's sexuality as something that will erupt hints at the discomfort that it arouses. Eruption denotes something that has been under pressure, and perhaps hidden, suddenly and violently coming to the surface. This trepidation that the Black woman's sexuality causes is further proof of mainstream cinema's fascination with Goldberg. Mainstream audiences are not anxious when they attend a Goldberg film. They know they are in for light-hearted fare and not an explosion of Black female sexuality.

Usually when the Black woman is described in film as exotic, it means that she is sexually savage. For a Goldberg character, exotic takes on new meaning. It means that she has waist-length dreadlocks as in *Clara's Hart*, or walks like a man even in an evening gown in *Jumpin' Jack Flash*. It means that many of her characters dress in baggy, mismatched clothing and have masculine-sounding names like Terry, Eddie, and Guinan. Whatever exotic means for Goldberg, it does not

⁴ Here I use normal in contrast to overt. The Black woman on screen is often presented as overtly sexual, but images of her as having a normal sex life, no more, no less than any one else, is rare.

mean sensual, sexual, or even feminine. According to Andrea Stuart in "Making Whoopi,"

Cinematically she is not really constructed as a woman at all--neither nurturer nor siren, the faithful drudge of the antebellum South nor the funky chick born to walk on the wild side of the city's mean streets. (12)

Stuart's analysis is useful in acknowledging the fact that Goldberg has been *deliberately* removed from any of these categories. Hollywood film has done such a good job of effacing her sexuality, in all senses of the word, that even Goldberg realizes that it is what has been removed from her presentation that accounts in large part for her success.⁵

In an interview with Lea DeLaria for the *Advocate* in 1995, Goldberg talked about her lack of sexuality and its affect on her career.

I don't have to be beautiful. I can be really big, I can be wrinkley because it's all about the work. It's not about "Oh, we put you in this movie because you're really great to look at." (50)

Goldberg is well aware that mainstream audiences have been able to accept her because she is not typically desirable. She sees her lack of dependence on looks as a kind of freedom. Yet, in an image-privileged society, to be unconcerned with "looks" is to be concerned with a particular

⁵ I do not mean to propose here that Goldberg or any other actor must be attractive or feminine in order to truly be considered an actor, or that Goldberg is not a talented performer. I merely wish to point out that a great deal of her success, as with many other performers, has to do with her physical appearance. One of the reasons Hollywood and mainstream audiences embrace her is because she is not typically attractive. She negates the image of the Black woman as Whore or Jezebel, at least physically.

look. Goldberg is not free from the stereotypical presentations usually reserved for Black women on screen, she is rather held to a different set of standards. These standards dictate that she not be sexually desirable or politically confrontational.

This privileging of the non-sexual and Goldberg's seeming acquiescence is not new in the Black woman's arsenal of survival strategies. Goldberg belongs to a sisterhood of Black women who have willingly subverted their sexuality in order to survive and even thrive in this society. In "African-American Women's History and The Metalanguage of Race," Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham illuminates Darlene Clark Hines' theory on "cultural dissemblance" (106). Higginbotham writes:

Black women, especially those of the middle class, reconstructed and represented their sexuality through its absence--through silence, secrecy, and invisibility. In so doing, they sought to combat the pervasive negative images and stereotypes.
(106)

Cultural dissemblance was a tool Black women often implemented to avoid sexual harassment. In order to protect themselves from the advances of a society who saw them as little more than whores they sought to become the opposite. Many Black women were so compelled to combat the notion of themselves as hypersexualized that they shunned sexuality altogether. They used ultraconservative and even asexual forms of dress and mannerisms to divert attention from themselves as women. These kinds of measures were often taught to young Black daughters by their mothers. Since, as Hill Collins says, Black women "were denied male protection. Under such conditions it [was] essential that Black mothers teach their daughters skills that [would] "take them anywhere" (126). Thus, cultural dissemblance became a skill important to the survival and progression of the Black woman. It has been essential to the success of Goldberg in Hollywood film. She has been rewarded by Hollywood and mainstream audiences for allowing herself to be purged of the most egregious signs of femininity and sexuality.

Goldberg, like the Black audience, must practice some selective reading in order to thrive in Hollywood. In the interview with DeLaria she further articulates her place in mainstream cinema. DeLaria compliments her on her ability to

do both comedy and drama as she compares *Jumpin' Jack Flash* and *Boys on the Side*. Goldberg states:

There are not a lot of people who can, Lea, and that's the key. That's why I'm still here. Because regardless of how the powers that be feel about me, there is one definite thing: I have the ability to do both. (51)

Goldberg is extremely confident that it is her ability that has endeared her to Hollywood film. While it is impossible to deny her talent, it is also impossible to forget that Hollywood filmmaking is a business, concerned more with bottom lines than showcasing great talents. Goldberg's negotiation of her own imagery becomes incredibly complex with her next statement. While on the one hand she believes that she is free from the aesthetic chains that bind the majority of actors in the business, on the other she does understand how important her image is. When the interviewer asks Goldberg what the "powers that be" think of her, Goldberg replies:

I can't think about that because then I would have to hear the static of "Your nose is too big, your ass is too big, you're too dark, you're too light, your hair is too weird, your feet are too long. (51)

Even the talent of the "dreaded one" cannot overcome the visual privileging that is Hollywood. Even Goldberg has to admit that while they do not require her to be yellow-skinned or svelte, that she has not been set completely free from a Hollywood aesthetic. There is a place for her

particular look. Hollywood does not alter a formula if it works. The concoction that is Whoopi Goldberg stripped of femininity, sexuality, and culture is what Hollywood needs.

As early as 1973 Mae C. King wrote in "The Politics of Sexual Stereotypes" that 'the invisible orientation,' i.e., a kind of non-recognition by America of the black woman's existence, tends to prevail in the absence of the negative stereotype" (20). King is pointing to the tendency of society either to think of the Black woman in stereotypical terms, or to ignore her altogether. As both a producer and a production of society, Hollywood film is no different. The filmmakers use the parts of Goldberg that are beneficial, but they ignore the parts of her that would require effort to negotiate or disturb established boundaries. Thus, family, community, and femininity are all ignored in the body of Whoopi Goldberg.

Not only are many of these aspects ignored but many of her films work to conceal them. For instance, in *Made in America* Goldberg is presented in the rare capacities of mother and romantic interest. But even these roles are not typical in that she conceives her child via a sperm donor and she and her love interest spend most of their scenes arguing. Even the very physical presence of her body is surreptitiously presented in most of her films. Goldberg is readily recognized for a kind of asexual dress that never accentuates her body. Even in the evening gown scene from *Jumpin' Jack Flash*, she does not look feminine or even

attractive in her electric-blue, sequined evening gown. The contrast of the blue gown, with a red wig and her dark skin is far from complimentary. She looks as she is intended to look, like a clown. Even the peripheral characters in the movie mistake her for a tranvestite prostitute in her blue gown. Such a comment works purposefully to thwart her sexuality.

Additionally, in *Jumpin' Jack Flash*, there is a scene wherein Goldberg has to enter a party at the British Embassy. In lieu of a legitimate invitation to enter, she presses "play" on the Walkman strapped around the waist of her blue evening gown and begins to lip-synch Diana Ross. While the white people stand around her mouthing "Aren't you . . .?," Goldberg dances off to rescue her computer pen-pal. The body is accentuated as spectacle by the fact that it is an entertainer that Goldberg must mimic in order to gain access to the Embassy. At such a posh affair, where the guests are expecting the Queen, the only way for Goldberg to enter is as the entertainment. Also, Goldberg looks nothing like Diana Ross, the guests at the party see a Black woman singing "You Can't Hurry Love" and assume that she must be Diana Ross. This scene in *Jumpin' Jack Flash* plays on the racist adage that all Black people look alike. Thus, the Black woman as an individual is discarded. In the minds of people at the party, as well as the audience, Goldberg's only legitimate reason for attending such an event is that she must be there to entertain.

The connotations surrounding this idea of the entertainer are complex. Because this is a Whoopi Goldberg film, there must be some sort of comedic spin to the scene so that she is not mistaken for illegitimate entertainment. She must appear clown-like in appearance and not attractive or desirable, so she is kept in her proper place. Goldberg must not be mistaken for anyone's date because that would present her as alluring to the male guests who are of course white. Neither can she be mistaken for a high-priced call girl because that is not in keeping with profitable presentations of Whoopi Goldberg.

According to Mae C. King, this aversion to presenting Goldberg as a sexual being is linked directly to the maintenance of social, political, and economic hierarchies. She writes "the depreciated sex image is intended to protect white males against momentary passion, compassion, or compunction that might result from his physical contact with black females" (17). If the large-body types of Hattie McDaniel and Louise Beavers were convenient to their presentation and were used to remove them from the confines of feminine attractiveness, then in like manner Hollywood capitalizes on Goldberg's asexual and comedic appearance.

Goldberg often dresses as if she were ashamed of her body in her movies. In *Clara's Hart*, Clara (Goldberg) slaps David's (Neil Patrick Harris) hand when during a foot massage his hand travels too near her knee. The character reacts so violently at what is clearly meant to represent a naive

action by a child, the viewer is left to ponder this moment. At this point in the narrative the audience is unaware that Clara has been raped. Yet, even the eventual revelation of the rape works in consonance with the audience's feeling that Clara is and should be ashamed of her body. After all the rapist was not only a Black man, but her own son. Thus, she could be held doubly responsible as both the victim and the villain's mother. The character of Clara spends much of the film in baggy pants and knee-length sweaters and shirts, even when we see her in Jamaica. In addition, in the film *Fatal Beauty*, there is very little about Goldberg that appears feminine, particularly, in the scene where she poses as a prostitute. This time she is dressed in a gold-lamé gown and a long platinum-blond wig. Again, the color contrast between hair, skin, and clothing results in an absurdity that parodies femininity. In short, Goldberg looks so ridiculous even the real street-walkers jeer her as she walks by.

The clothing in the film *Bogus* is also important. In *Fatal Beauty*, Goldberg is clad in jeans, sneakers, and a man's oversized jacket; in *Made in America*, she dresses in African-styled oversized shirts and pants. In *Bogus*, Goldberg is clad in two-piece suits throughout the majority of the movie. The stylish suits are an indication that Goldberg runs her own business. She is tough and aggressive, with no social life, and her austere dress seems an indication of this. However one of the indications of the change in her character as the film progresses is the change in her style of dress.

We see her morph from a driven business woman to a surrogate mother. At the end of the film, after dancing Ginger Rogers to Bogus' Fred Astaire, a softening of her character is indicated by long floral dresses and a floppy, straw hat. Although the evening gown in this scene is not sequined and she gets to wear her own hair, the scene still has a overwhelming sense of the comedic. Goldberg and DePardieu simply look funny/odd impersonating Rogers and Astaire.

Like *Fatal Beauty*, *Made in America* is not only important for the way Goldberg is presented physically, but for the introduction of an interracial relationship. While in *Fatal Beauty*, the audience is left to assume that Goldberg and Sam Shepard have consummated their relationship, *Made in America* allows no more than a bungled attempt at intimacy. In both of these scenarios the chemistry between Goldberg and her leading men is dampened by the constant bickering. In *Fatal Beauty*, she is intent on arresting the man for which Sam Elliot works. As a police detective chasing drug lords, there is little time for Goldberg and Shepard to engage in romance. In her film with Ted Danson, hopes are high for the on screen romance given her real-life involvement with the actor at the time. But, true to Goldberg formula, even this off-screen romance is not allowed fruition on screen. In both of these films the leading man is only allowed to rush to Goldberg's side as she lays in the hospital. A roof falls on her in *Fatal Beauty* and in *Made in America*, she is hit by a car while on her bicycle. In each case the body is conveniently

damaged so that attempts at intimacy are arrested or aborted. Glaring white bandages on her head and a cast on her leg act as sufficient stop signs for any amorous advances from her suitors and any deviation from the way she is "normally" presented.

Again, any effort at intimacy is effectively stymied in *Bogus* because Bogus is an imaginary character--even within the film's diegetic space. The only real man with whom Goldberg comes in sustained contact in this film is her banker--who happens to be Black and single. Yet, the only conversation between the two is business. When the banker makes it personal by inviting her to his son's birthday party, she is so uncomfortable she nearly ruins the gathering.

Sexual Freedom and Freedom From Sexuality

S. V. Hartman and Farah Jasmine Griffin contend in "Are You as Colored as That Negro?: The Politics of Being Seen in Julie Dash's *Illusion*," that the black woman in mainstream film is little more than her body parts. They write that "the body exposes us. It is a site of shame. 'The truth' of the body becomes evidence used against us" (362). In a medium designed to exalt the body (the white body), the Black body bears the repercussions of not quite measuring up. It is also subject to splintering so that Black women in most Hollywood films end up being hands, feet, or just vaginas. Goldberg is

no exception. While she may not be legs or breasts, she is hands and feet and does very often become a heart--yearning to bleed for her white co-stars. This became especially true when she was removed from the realm of heterosexuality altogether.

Hollywood is able to capitalize on Goldberg's asexual/masculine persona in the movie *Boys on the Side*. In this film Goldberg is a lesbian. Yet, the audience only knows that she is a lesbian because we are told. There are no stereotypical physical or social markings that identify her as such. Because Goldberg's sexuality is at best ambiguous in any movie, audiences are not shocked or forced to negotiate homo-eroticism in this movie. As a production for mainstream cinema it is significant that Goldberg was the one chosen to play this role. While there have been successful Hollywood films that featured intimate relationships between women, they were not the kinds of films that openly mentioned lesbianism. Much has been written about films like *Thelma and Louise* and *Fried Green Tomatoes* for the kind of intimacy that is exhibited between its female protagonists. *Boys on the Side* is different in that the star of the film is openly lesbian. Such a movie aimed at mainstream audiences would require a female star who would not negatively provoke the audience. It required an actor who could present herself as a lesbian while not alienating the film's mainstream audiences. Goldberg becomes the obvious choice because her already

asexual and masculine persona is easily translated for the film's purposes.

Not only is Goldberg's body presence easily adapted to the role of Jane in *Boys*, the audience is never presented with anything openly homosexual. *Boys* is careful not to play on the audiences' probable discomfort with stereotypes of the passive-femme kind of lesbian or the swaggering bull-dyke. What they see is Goldberg acting in the manner she usually does. They see her looking, hinting and make innuendoes, but she does this in many of her films. The movie is an acceptable offering to mainstream audiences because lesbianism is haltingly presented as women's friendships and never as passion or physical love between women. Yet, if the movie only tentatively toys with the notion of lesbianism it most emphatically calls into question ideas about race and deviant aspects of sexuality.

As an actor whose femininity and sexuality is not often foregrounded in a movie, it is significant that she is cast as a lesbian in *Boys on the Side*. The significance lies not only in the fact that the vehicle which finally allows her to be a sexual entity, calls for her to be homosexual, but in the fact that it is a Black woman in this role. According to Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham in the "Metalanguage of Race," "race impregnates the simplest of meanings we take for granted" (95). As such, casting a Black woman as the star of a movie in which she is openly lesbian, and the only Black person, means something. In "Women on Top, Boys on the Side

But Some of Us are Brave: Blackness, Lesbianism and the Visible," Ann Pellegrini maintains that Goldberg's presence in *Boys* works to affirm notions of Blackness as sexually different/deviant. She writes:

Where and how can you tell the difference between female homosociality and female homosexuality? This, I want to suggest, is the work Jane's blackness does. Of the three female friends, Jane is the only lesbian character named as such; she is also the only woman of color. Her blackness visibly marks out the difference between the lesbian and the straight woman she loves and who may even love her in return, just "not in that way." (90)

Pellegrini sees Jane's Blackness, her lone, sole Black presence in the film as a visible signifier for lesbianism. There are certainly few if any other visible signifiers of lesbianism in the film. Instead of the Goldberg character being emptied of any sexual or racial connotations as is usual in her films, in *Boys*, Blackness is suddenly resuscitated in terms of sexual markers. The result is that the image of Goldberg as a Black woman is still being manipulated in this film. In this case, it is not Blackness that is being made more palatable for the audience but rather homosexuality. Whereas Goldberg's presence as a Black person and as a woman would normally be emptied of its potency in order keep the audience comfortable, here Blackness is allowed to substitute/prostitute for homosexuality. Goldberg as a Black woman becomes synonymous with sexual practices different from the "norm." Thus, the audience does not end

up having to read homosexuality in the film, but instead are allowed read Blackness in the place of it.

As Pellegrini observes, Jane is the only Black woman among the main characters and the only one who claims to be a lesbian. Both the Drew Barrymore (Holly) and Mary-Louise Parker (Robin) characters are marked as anything but lesbians. Holly and Robin's whiteness, as opposed to Jane's Blackness, function as markers to differentiate between heterosexuality and homosexuality. In addition to both of them stating throughout the film that they are not gay, and the evidence of their white skin, both bear in their bodies the signs of their sexual relationships with men. Holly (Barrymore) becomes pregnant in the film and Robin (Parker) is in the last stages of her bout with AIDS. Holly and Robin though marked differently by their involvement with men (one with life the other with death) are none-the-less inscribed. We cannot mistake them for lesbians because they wear their heterosexuality literally upon their bodies.

While *Boys on the Side* could use Goldberg as a conduit for expressing homosexuality, they could not effectively use her as a character with AIDS. Although, in its public perception AIDS was a disease originally associated with homosexual males, it has never been associated with lesbians. Subsequently AIDS now has the additional stigma of being associated with heterosexual promiscuity. Goldberg can be presented as the lone lesbian, but again, not as promiscuous. To associate her with AIDS is to invoke the image of the

hypersexual Black female. To depict pale, blonde Mary-Louise Parker with AIDS is to invigorate notions of the sexually victimized white female. Moreover, as Robin recounts how she became infected with AIDS, sympathy with her character only grows. The tale of a lonely girl in New York City infected by her boyfriend is bound to create empathy with the viewing audience. Robin has not been a "bad girl" as would have to be assumed if her character were played by a Black woman. Instead, Robin is the victim of circumstance.

No matter the sub-genres of *Boys on the Side*--girl-buddy movie, Jack Kerouac on-the-road movie, ephemeral boundaries between hetero and homosexual love movie--it is still primarily a movie uncomfortable with the Black woman's body. Were it a film truly engaged in depicting a lesbian tale, there might have been at least a kiss. Were it a film interested in exploring the world of Black lesbians, there would have been some backstory given to Jane. Instead she just emerges as the awful lead singer in an awful band, looking to start over in California. The film might even have toyed with the idea of Jane's loving a white woman who was not suffering a fatal disease. She might have gotten a whole healthy white woman who at least had the time to love her back. Were it a movie about interracial female friendships, perhaps Jane would not have had to fit solely into a white world, to the exclusion of any family, community, friends, or girl-friends who looked like her. It is a movie still so

uneasy with all the connotations inherent in the Black woman's body.

In *Fear of the Dark: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Cinema*, Lola Young surmises that:

Avoiding issues raised by interracial sexual relationships and maintaining a distance from any activity which may be interpreted as interracial intimacy is one of the manifestations of a strategy of aversion. This can be identified as a consistent feature of films made by white people: there is a constant refusal to relate intimately to black people's knowledge and experiences, despite presentations to the contrary. (25)

The fact that Jane is in love with Robin and that Robin has AIDS illumines how little Hollywood cinema is willing to deviate from its formula where Goldberg is concerned. Any real attempts at intimacy between the two are shut down, and Jane (Goldberg) is confined to "looking" at Robin and "singing" not speaking her love. Rather than open up the possibilities of intimacy, same-sex intimacy, and interracial intimacy, the film reverts to status quo. Goldberg becomes the supernurturer again. Jane even tries to set Robin (the woman Jane loves) up with a mutual male friend because Robin misses having sex. She even remains in Arizona with Robin and cares for her until her death. While the audience is told stories from Robin's past, shown pictures from her childhood, returns with her to a childhood vacation spot and even meets her mother, we know nothing of Jane--except that she can not sing. Once again, the Goldberg character is cut off from any

signs that Blackness is a culture and history in addition to skin color.

In the end, *Boys on the Side* follows the typical Goldberg formula and does not even live up to its name. Boys are never an aside in this movie. Even though they may die, they remain at the center of the three women's existence. The women are either on trial for murdering them, having their babies, dying from unions with them, or in Jane's case-- trying to make sure the woman she loves has sex with one, one last time.

Hollywood film not only made a half-hearted attempt to present Goldberg as a lesbian, but they took her to the world of cross-dressing. In *The Associate*, Goldberg is a Wall Street executive named Laurel Ayers. After losing a promotion to the young white man she trained, Laurel realizes that the world of high finance is still made up of good-old-boys. She starts her own company only to find that no one wants to do business with a company headed by a Black woman. To survive Laurel literally creates a business partner named Robert Cutty. Cutty is none other than Goldberg heavily made up to look like a man. But Goldberg is not just impersonating any man, she trades both her skin and her gender in this role. As Robert Cutty, the white man, Laurel is able to secure both the respect and the clients who would have otherwise eluded her.

The Associate, like *Boys on the Side*, is an opportunity lost. The film could examine the myths surrounding Black

womanhood, but simply does not. Instead it takes the safe way out and chooses to comment on the treatment of women in a traditionally male dominated field. Although the character's entire purpose for changing herself into a man stems as much from racial bias as gender bias, race is hardly mentioned in the film. The presence of Laurel's aging white assistant fosters solidarity between the two women. They have been slighted because of their sex. The assistant too, has been overlooked in the corporate world controlled by white men. Her age indicates that she began to climb the ladder before it became fashionable for a few (white) "women" to have keys to the executive wash room. But Laurel's race and her assistant's age are only peripheral considerations; what binds them together in their fight against the system is sisterhood.

Perhaps their solidarity would be more believable if race were not so blatantly overlooked in the movie. No one ever mentions that Laurel is Black, although race is by and large the reason for her pretense. Even in the most poignant scene concerning race, race is not mentioned. At the end of the movie Robert Cutty is presented with an award commemorating his business savvy and Laurel is forced to appear in drag once more. At the podium in front of an audience, Laurel unmaskes and exposes her true identity. As the crowd sits in stunned silence, two Black waiters begin applauding Laurel. It is interesting that the only evidence we see of other Black people in the movie is the presence of

the waiters. Perhaps this explains Laurel's reasons for masquerading as a white man and not a Black one. The scene seems to say that the only legitimate place for Blacks in the corporate world is as servants.⁶ Any other access they gain must result from deception and denial. Laurel must deny both her race and her gender and delude both her clients and herself in order to succeed.

Tania Modleski elucidates the causes and consequences of cross-dressing in "A Woman's Gotta Do . . . What a Man's Gotta Do? Cross-Dressing in the Western." She critiques the movie *The Ballad of Little Jo*, the plot of which illumines the true story of Josephine Monaghan. Modleski writes that:

⁶ Just as the character Terry could only gain access to the British Embassy in *Jumpin' Jack Flash* as an entertainer, the same is true here, though the categories have been enlarged from entertainers to servants. Additionally, it is interesting that even in pretending to be Robert Cutty, the Laurel character is still performing for and entertaining the room full of white people.

she was an Eastern society girl who had a child out of wedlock and was disowned by her family. Josephine Monaghan gave the child to her sister to care for and came out West, taking on the identity of man sometime during her journey (524).

Like Laurel Ayers, the character of little Jo begins dressing like a man in order to succeed in her career. She acquires first a good job and then ends up owning her own sheep ranch. Jo is able to support herself and send money back to her child. Another reason for Jo's decision to assume a male identity is for protection. As a woman traveling alone in the West, Jo is easy prey for rapists. Laurel too needs the protection of a man. In order to cater to her wealthy clientele (most of whom are male) Laurel must be legitimated by a man. Laurel must assume the role of mouthpiece, while her clients rest assured that Robert Cutty is really the one running the company. Modleski surmises that "Jo's sexual fall and subsequent banishment from her high-society family would have led her straight into prostitution had she not struck on the idea of disguising herself as a man" (530). The Goldberg character's reasoning is near the same. Both the characters of Laurel and Little Jo are compelled to become men to avoid economic, social and sexual discrimination. However, Laurel must also add race in her equation.

CHAPTER 3
THE CROSSOVER FORMULA

Matriarchs

In *Black Feminist Thought*, Patricia Hill Collins writes that the task of defining Black women falls to Black women. The first public space Black women used to define themselves was their storytelling, next it was their music, and lastly it has been in their writing. The next frontier in which the Black woman will construct herself is in cinema. In many of the films by African American women (as with their fiction and theory) cinematic depictions of Black women include representations that resist stereotypes, particularly in the face of those categories that are most closely associated with womanhood. We have already examined the stereotypes that have arisen concerning Black women and their ability to mother white children. However, of equal import are the tropes that herald the Black woman's tenuous relationship with her own children. Also in question is her perceived inability to exist in harmony with Black men and with other Black women. This chapter looks at motherhood where a Goldberg character is again doing the mothering, but this time of Black children. It also examines the representations of Goldberg when she is the wife of a Black man or the sister

and/or friend of a Black woman, and concludes that the lack of these kinds of characterizations signal Hollywood's utilization of the cross-over formula.

More or Less a Mother

Motherhood in the Black community, as in any community, is complex and multi-dimensional. In the Black community there are birth mothers, other-mothers, community mothers, God-mothers, and Muh-Dears, just to name a few. The mother-daughter relationship is as heterogeneous as the relationship between Black mothers and their sons. All of these relationships have endured archetypal presentations by both mainstream cinema producers, and even Black film directors, that is when they are explored at all. Thus the lack of Black mothers among the multitude of characters that Goldberg plays reads as a glaring omission. This oversight becomes even more obvious when read against her ability to mother white children (*Corrina, Corrina*; *Clara's Heart*, *Bogus*, *The Long Walk Home*).

Although Herman Gray is speaking specifically about television in *Watching Race: Television and the Struggle for Blackness*, much of what he says is relevant to film study. Gray maintains:

In order for television to achieve its work--that is, to make meaning and produce pleasure--it has to draw upon and operate on the basis of a kind of generalized societal common sense about the terms of society and people's social location to it. The social ground and the cultural terms on which it works depend on assumptions about experience, knowledge, familiarity, and the accessibility of viewers to these assumptions. (9)

Just as television relies on the social and cultural codes that have already been established to speak to its audience so obviously does film. Just as film reproduces cultural and social codings in order to communicate, so too all social interaction depends upon some previous foundation for meaning, and some agreed upon method of excavating and exchanging meaning. As with any actor, Goldberg is important to the process of creating and reifying both specific and non-specific codic language on screen. However, Goldberg is particularly important because of her popularity with mainstream cinema audiences. In many ways mainstream cinema audiences' perception of Black women is affected by their perception of Goldberg. Not only do mainstream cinema audiences like to see her in roles where she is disconnected from any cultural or familial identity, they never get to see her any other way. Thus, the decision not to represent her as a mother to Black children signals the unwillingness and/or inability of mainstream filmmakers and their audiences to see Blackness as anything but an aside. To put it simply, mainstream audiences do not seem to be interested in "looking" at a Black woman or a Black family or Black people

on screen, they are only interested in looking at Whoopi Goldberg. They want to see Goldberg in movies where she is removed from family, community and often history, because movies are still the places this society goes to escape reality--not embrace it.

While it is not necessary that Hollywood cinema present Goldberg as a Black mother always or even often, it does seem as if these kinds of characters should represent a larger part of her repertoire given the extent of her work. It is not that Goldberg never plays a mother to Black children, she does. However, these kinds of roles are limited in scope and number. Currently, she has only mothered Black children in *Ghosts of Mississippi*, *The Long Walk Home*, and *Kiss Shot*--a little-known television movie. Goldberg has also been the mother of bi-racial children in *Moonlight and Valentino* and *Made in America*.³ Both *Ghosts of Mississippi* and *The Long Walk Home* have Goldberg playing Civil Rights era heroines in true stories. In each instance, the larger narratives obscure her relationships with her children. The television movie *Kiss Shot* and the feature film *Made in America* are the only two movies in her extensive film career wherein prolonged dialogue and interaction takes place between a Goldberg character and her children.

Of all her forays into motherhood Goldberg's historical dramas are the most disappointing. The disappointment is at

³In *Soap Dish* when Goldberg plays sidekick to Sally Fields' lead, her children are mentioned as "the twins." Neither these children nor a husband, if there is one, appear on screen. Also she is the mother of a son in *Clara's Hart*, but he is dead and does not appear on screen.

least understandable in *Ghosts of Mississippi*: it is not really a movie about Medger Evers, Myrlie Evers or their family, but rather the lawyer who prosecuted the case. *The Long Walk Home*, is however, a lost opportunity to portray the inner workings of a Black family in segregated Alabama. The family of Sissy Spacek's character is studied so intently in the film, it seems only logical that the Goldberg character's family be scrutinized as well.

The Long Walk Home presents Goldberg as the maid of middle-class housewife Sissy Spacek. In the movie, the audience is made privy to the dynamic between the two women as employer and employee, and as mothers. Odessa Cotter (the Goldberg character) is the long suffering and silent family maid who participates in the Montgomery Bus Boycott and begins walking to work. Spacek, as the sympathetic southern bell offers her a ride. What begins as providing a ride for her own maid ends up with Spacek participating as a full-fledged driver in the Boycott.

Throughout the movie we are allowed glimpses into the contrasting lives of both these women. The depictions are stereotypical. Spacek is the privileged white woman who spends her days leaving instructions for the maid on her way to the Junior League and the hair dresser. Goldberg is so tired from the long walk to work that she falls asleep while washing dishes. Even the way the women relate to their children is stereotypical. Spacek seems distant from both her daughters. The youngest spends her time with Goldberg, who

teaches her to iron and takes her to the park. When it comes to Goldberg's own children, she shows them little emotion. She snaps at the children and is even too stoic to acknowledge the Christmas gift they give her. Even when her young son is beaten by white boys for protecting his sister, the Goldberg character is relatively unresponsive. While we see her go to painstaking lengths to get her young white charge a Christmas present, we see no such gift-giving to her own children.

Goldberg as the mother to a Black child fares only slightly better in *Made in America*. In this movie, there is a relationship between Sarah and her daughter Zora, although they seem at times to be more like sisters than mother and daughter. In *Made in America*, Zora finds out that she was conceived as a result of a sperm donation. Sarah has led the girl to believe that her father (Sarah's husband) died just prior to Zora's birth. The plot begins to thicken as Zora learns that her biological father was not only an anonymous sperm doner, but is a white man. What better way to subvert the depiction of Goldberg as a mother or even as someone's lover. Not only is her child conceived outside of the confines of at least a physical relationship, Zora is practically manufactured in a lab. The conception, like the storyline, is neat and sterile. Additionally, the fact that the doner is a white man only belabors the point. Hollywood film seems adamant against presenting Goldberg with a Black lover.

Thus this story obscures the mother-daughter relationship as well, and focuses instead on their adjustment to and subsequent meeting with the doaner dad. Because Zora is a honor student, about to graduate from high school the only tension between mother and daughter is the circumstance of Zora's birth. When emotions do rise to the surface, for instance when Zora's "father" rejects her or when Zora becomes jealous of his (Hal's) interest in her mother, Sarah and Zora do not talk. In both instances, Sarah addresses the situation with Hal and not with Zora. While there is nothing inherently negative in the relationship between Sarah and Zora, it is not presented as a deep and multi-dimensional relationship. Even in this movie the Goldberg character is not overtly nurturing or even motherly toward her own child. This only appears strange given the tendency by mainstream cinema producers to cast Goldberg in movies where nurturing is her strong suit. It is worth noting that Goldberg seems filmicly more capable of nurturing her white peers and/or their children, than her own.

Of these films where Goldberg plays a mother, perhaps the more interesting is the movie *Kiss Shot*. It is one of the two Goldberg movies where the Goldberg character herself actually has a mother on screen. In this 1989 made-for-television movie, Goldberg is a single-mother turned pool hustler to make ends meet. Sarah Collins is struggling to meet a balloon payment on her house when she loses her job. Her only recourse is to become partners with a bookie who

sets up and places bets on her pool games. *Kiss Shot* is one of Goldberg's most interesting films because we see her, even if briefly, as both a mother and a daughter. But the excitement is short-lived when the film establishes in the first few frames that Sarah is estranged from her parents. In an attempt to procure money for her impending loan, Sarah travels to see her parents for the first time since her daughter has been born. Thirteen-year-old Jenny has never seen her grandparents. As the story unfolds we learn that Sarah's parents disowned her when she became pregnant with Jenny in high school. So as not to mistake this Goldberg character for an unwed mother, the film quickly reveals that she and Jenny's father married, but never explains why he is not present in the narrative. Thus, Jenny's father remains a mystery and the audience is left to assume that he is dead or has run off. We only know that he is the reason Sarah learned to play pool. This lack of a father/husband does make room in the story for romance, which is again a rare happening in a Goldberg film. Yet, even when a Goldberg film seems as if it will break out of its usual mold, the result is very often deception.

Kiss Shot ends up following the formula that keeps it from being a "Black movie." The Goldberg character does have some connection to the Black community in this movie. She has both parents and a daughter, but her real sources of social interaction are her white friends. Once she loses her job at an electronics company, Sarah returns to work for her white

friends who own a diner. The couple, Jim and Ruby, care for her daughter during her pool tournaments, and they even offer to lend her as much money as they can. Although Ruby is much older than Sarah, she appears to be Sarah's best and only friend. Even as a young, Black, single mother, Goldberg is not associated with other young, Black women.

Sarah and the bookie, Max, also become the best of friends. Max (Denis Franz) even goes so far as to confess to Sarah that he has feelings for her, which she of course does not return. *Kiss Shot* has the distinction of being the only Goldberg movie thus far to depict a Goldberg character in a relationship with a Black man. This particular aspect of the movie will be discussed later in this chapter. Still, as promising as *Kiss Shot* begins, it also marks the end of any attempts by Hollywood filmmakers to depict Goldberg as a fully developed character. After this movie, her roles return to the Hollywood formula. This methodology is not specific to Goldberg, but rather specific to the treatment of Black stars meant to be mainstream box-office draws.

It seems almost formulaic that Hollywood pick a Black comedian/enne and script filmic roles in which they are the only people of color. Richard Pryor and Eddie Murphy were both precursors to Goldberg as the recipients of this kind of effacement. In "Did Hollywood Set Out to Undo Eddie Murphy?: The Gay Subtext in Beverly Hills Cop," Trey Ellis contends that there is indeed a Hollywood formula when it comes to

making movies with Black comic stars intended to draw mainstream audiences. He writes:

Paramount had a problem. How was it possible to use him [Eddie Murphy], without making the dreaded "Black movie?" For in Hollywood's eyes, and perhaps in the audience's, if Foley had a love interest, the movie would become ghettoized. (16)

The formula that has worked best for Hollywood is to avoid making a "Black movie." A Black movie by Hollywood standards seems to be any in which its Black lead has any ties to the Black community. This has been the methodology they have adopted when using Goldberg, and it has been successful.

Ellis goes on to expand the theory of avoiding the ghettoization of a movie when the lead actor is Black. He recalls the patterns set forth in movies with Eddie Murphy and Richard Pryor as a strangely convenient commingling of Black lead actors with white co-stars. Ellis says that *"Stir Crazy, 48 Hours, Silver Streak, and Trading Places"* were the obvious precedents. In all of these films, the effect of the Black lead's color was diluted by mixing him with a white companion." The same is done continually in movies featuring Goldberg. So that mainstream audiences will not perceive any of her movies as "Black," she is most often the only Black person in her movies. As an added measure, usually all references to her as Black are stricken from the record. It is almost as if mainstream audiences are coaxed into even forgetting that she is Black in her movies. She is often coded as quirky and weird, even wise and sage, but never as

Black. By now Black audiences have long realized that to see Goldberg in a movie trailer is not to expect a movie about, for, or even with other Black people. While Black audiences are disappointed, they are not surprised. They understand that Goldberg was never constructed as a Black woman on screen, but rather as a Black woman whose Blackness is defined, refined, contained, and utilized as a margin for whiteness.²

Always a Nurturer, Never a Mother

In his essay, "Cultural Theory and Cinematic Representation," Stuart Hall contends that identity must be thought of as "a production which is never complete, always in process and constituted within, not outside of representation" (221). Yet, the very nature of film as a producer of identity is to hold it captive. Film is bilingual: it speaks verbally and its images speak. The images in particular must draw from a set of codes already at work in society. When individual and societal identity changes then so must the codes. Hollywood cinema and the product it delivers to its audiences has changed as the audience changed, but only minimally. The kind of verbal language used

² In October of 1995 I was listening to the highest-rated, Black-hosted radio show in the country--the Tom Joyner Morning show. He was criticizing Goldberg's latest release at the time--*Moonlight and Valentino*. Joyner and all of his co-hosts agreed that the producers should not have bothered to give the movie a title but instead called it "Whoopi and White People #3, indicating the cookie-cutter quality of her movies.

and the presentation of sexuality and gender have all evolved as society has evolved. Marilyn Monroe has become Julia Roberts, Clark Gable has become Harrison Ford, so that at least the appearance has changed. Yet, as much as identity and definitions of identity change in society, as much as they rotate and become fluid, film is one venue where the changes are slow and minute. Film draws from the archetype. It must produce a hero, a villain, a victim, and/or a killer. It must do so because no matter how much individual identity changes archetypes do not. This is particularly true when it comes to presenting Black women on screen. Whoopi Goldberg is the most prolific Black actress in Hollywood but in order to be so, she must be presented in terms reminiscent of one of history's most infamous archetypes. Hollywood cinema feeds its audiences what appeals to them. Whoopi Goldberg as the mammy reincarnated again and again appeals to mainstream audiences. Mainstream audiences enjoy her like this because to meet her in any other way is to cause shifts in, and contradictions to, their own identity.

These shifts and contradictions involve acknowledgment of the kind of inequalities that are inherent in this society. Karen Ross writes in *Black and White Media: Black Images in Popular Film and Television*:

With few exceptions, Goldberg's career has been made on her talent for playing desexualized clowns, non-threatening black fantasy women who can appeal to a mass white audience and her improbable impersonation of a nun. But perhaps part of Goldberg's appeal may be precisely that her characterizations provide a comforting respite from the constant negotiations about race which other films featuring black performers require, since her ethnicity is never a controversial issue. (24)

Ross confirms the premise that Goldberg's career has been built on the fact that her ethnicity is never confrontational. It never demands that mainstream cinema audiences be held accountable for race relations in this society, but rather sells and sells again the filmic myth of ethnic harmony. Mainstream audiences are secure both in their seats and in their identity when attending a Goldberg film.

If Goldberg is rarely seen in movies where she mothers Black children, then her appearances opposite a Black male are almost nonexistent. So too are her on-screen relationships with Black women. The same is not true however of her in romantic relationships with white men. *Corrina, Corrina*; *Made in America*, *Fatal Beauty*, and *Moonlight and Valentino* all feature Goldberg in romantic relationships with white counterparts. Even *Jumpin' Jack Flash* features Goldberg with a white romantic interest, although their interaction takes place mostly on-line. In *Corrina, Corrina* and *Clara's Hart* she is married to Black men but they are in absentia. In *Eddie*, *Sarafina*, *Made in America*, and *Ghosts of Mississippi*, her Black husbands are dead. Thus, *The Long Walk Home* and

Kiss Shot are the only Goldberg movies that feature her in relationships with Black men.

Of the two movies her most disappointing relationship takes place in *The Long Walk Home*. The Goldberg character rarely appears on screen with her husband, and when she does they do not share intimate moments or words. In one scene he and Goldberg lie in bed together, discussing her first day walking home from work. Rather than comfort or exhort one another they turn away from one another and go to sleep. They are so tired they can do little more than exchange pleasantries. They are almost strangers as both assume their own sides of the bed. They are a couple with three children, yet they do not exchange more than a peck on the cheek throughout the movie. At the end of the film, when Goldberg is surrounded by an angry mob of white men, it is Sissy Spacek who comes to her rescue and not her own husband. The husband in this movie is little more than a prop. The opportunity to look at a relationship between a Black man and woman, even in this period piece is lost.

Kiss Shot does not fare much better in its reading. Although it is the most extensive portrayal of Goldberg and a Black man in a romantic relationship, it too ends up adhering to a formulaic and surface portrayal of a Black couple. Goldberg the waitress-turned-pool-hustler meets and falls in love with a wealthy rogue. After losing to him in a pool game and riding in his Porsche, Sarah finds herself in love. This love is complicated by the fact that she is a parent and

Kevin has never had to shoulder any kind of responsibility. The couple breaks up because Kevin is frightened by the thought of taking on a ready-made family. In the end he and Sarah do reunite, but only after he confesses his fears to the daughter. Jenny in effect saves the day by relaying the information to her mother. This reads as if the relationship between Sarah and Kevin is not strong enough to endure real conversation. We do see them spend time together, but most of their talk revolves around pool and Kevin's money. The movie concludes tidily, with Sarah, Kevin and Jenny racing off in his sports car. While it is perhaps unfair to look to this particular movie to provide a deep reflection on Black relationships, it is unfortunately the only one of its kind.

The fact that it was a television movie perhaps influences the limited portrayal of Sarah and Kevin's relationship. For example, after a candlelight dinner at Kevin's house, he and Sarah end the night by wading into the jacuzzi. They enter the jacuzzi without removing any of their clothing, not even stopping to remove their shoes, to exchange their only kiss. They do not hold hands or speak affectionately to one another, they spend the majority of the their scenes together eating dinner and talking shop. Goldberg is never presented in a sexual or even sensual manner. In fact, when she shows up at Kevin's house uninvited and another woman answers the door there is no mistaking the implications. The woman answers the door in a short robe as Kevin appears on the stairs without his shirt. In that

thirty-second scene, with the unnamed woman, there is more sexual innuendo than in Goldberg's entire sequence of scenes with Kevin. While I do not mean to imply that in order to represent romance on screen that there must be sexually explicit scenes, I do want to draw attention to the way Goldberg is almost never shown in this way.

In most of her movies Goldberg is not romantically paired with a man. When she is, he is almost always white. Returning to the notion of fully developed female characterizations, it is more than strange that Goldberg has never had a significant Black male counterpart in any of her big-screen films. In *Corrina, Corrina*; *Moonlight and Valentino*, *Jumpin' Jack Flash*, *Fatal Beauty*, and *Made in America* the men who manage to steal a few kisses or at least a date with Goldberg are all white.

The Goldberg movie which most threatens to present her as a sexual being on screen is *Moonlight and Valentino*. This movie stars an ensemble cast (Goldberg, Elizabeth Perkins, Gwyneth Paltrow and Kathleen Turner) and uses the life of Rebecca (Elizabeth Perkins) to segue into exploring the lives of the other three. The story begins with Rebecca on the morning her husband has been killed. Goldberg is Sylvie--Rebecca best friend. While this is the film in Goldberg's repertoire that most openly displays intimacy between her character and a man, it is thwarted by Sylvie's unusual attraction to Rebecca.

Sylvie is a potter in an unnamed New England town, married to a white man. We first see Sylvie dressed in Birkenstocks and white socks, with her locked hair pulled into pony tails, saying good-bye to her three children. She points to them one by one and tells them that she loves them, but hesitates when it comes to her husband. As Rebecca deals with the death of her husband, Sylvie is experiencing the death of her own marriage. She constantly runs to Rebecca for comfort as she believes Paul is withdrawing from her emotionally. This constant need for reassurance from Rebecca is in opposition to Goldberg's usual portrayal of the mammy figure. But true to Hollywood form, by the end of the movie the character of Sylvie has recovered enough to usher the other women in the movie into an emotional healing ritual.

The most peculiar aspect of this movie is the relationship (or the lack thereof) between Sylvie and her husband. Sylvie spends much of the movie lamenting the pending breakup of her marriage. Rebecca's stepmother (Kathleen Turner) even treats Sylvie and Paul to a romantic getaway that is supposed to save their marriage, but Sylvie does not enjoy being with her husband. The segment depicting Sylvie and Paul at the hotel is the most provocative of Goldberg's scenes with a male counterpart. Goldberg is dressed in a short silk pajama set and her husband is in the process of painting her body. Paul kisses her body passionately and looks for her to return his embrace. Sylvie turns off completely. Sylvie ends his display of affection

as she realizes she is the one who does not want the marriage to work. Even in this movie, where she actually has a husband and children, as in *The Long Walk Home*, there are inhibitions against Goldberg displaying femininity or intimacy with the husband characters, whether they are Black or white. Thus, even when the film calls for Goldberg to have a husband she is still not allowed to demonstrate an abundance of intimacy or femininity. These already strict standards governing Goldberg become even more rigid when her male compere is Black. On the whole it seems appropriate for a Goldberg character to appear as overly nurturing whether to white children or white friends but she must stop short of appearing feminine or sexual, especially in relationships with Black men.

Moonlight and Valentino is prescriptive in that Goldberg is not really allowed to have a relationship with her on-screen husband, but it is unique in its presentation of her relationship with Rebecca. Sylvie has no problems exhibiting her femininity, displaying her emotions, creating and maintaining intimacy with Rebecca. In fact, this movie, more so than *Boys On The Side*, seems to be the medium in which Goldberg performs homosociality if not homosexuality. Sylvie's attraction to Rebecca is glaringly evident in the film. Her interest in Rebecca seems in opposition to her relationship with her husband. It is Rebecca she embraces and Rebecca she talks to about her feelings. It is also Rebecca whom she takes to a neighbor's house so that they can sit on

this couple's porch and covet "a slice of their marriage." It is Sylvie and Rebecca who argue during the movie and then embrace and make up. All of the things that Sylvie shares with Rebecca are the things that should belong to Paul. Sylvie's fascination with Rebecca becomes even more evident when Sylvie says that she wishes Rebecca could jump into Paul's body when they are having sex. This statement is strange indeed, even for characters who are as close as these two are supposed to be. The implications of this statement are far ranging. Sylvie is in essence wishing that Rebecca could be her husband. Sylvie is implying that Rebecca understands and could be more intimate with her than even her husband. This works to frustrate Sylvie's representation as a wife. In sum, this Goldberg character and indeed, no other Goldberg characterization can successfully be the other half of a heterosexual relationship--of any hue. This kind of portrayal would allow her access to dimensions she has previously been denied by mainstream cinema producers and audiences alike. Sylvie's affinity for her female friend's company rather than her husband's prevents the character from breaching the boundaries established for Goldberg.

No matter the specific movie, Goldberg is touted first and foremost as a crossover star. The formula that has endeared her to the hearts of mainstream cinema audiences and to the financial statements of Hollywood cinema producers has been to remove her not only from the Black community, but to keep her interaction with the opposite sex to the bare

minimum. Thus it would be unlikely to see Goldberg in a movie which actually featured her in a relationship with a man (no matter his race) that ended or began successfully.

Corrina, Corrina is the movie that best features Goldberg in a relationship. While we do get on screen kisses and even controversy over the difference in Corrina's and Manny's (Ray Liotta) race we can get no satisfactory conclusion to their romance. At the end of the movie, the audience is left to believe that the two will continue their relationship, but are not given any clues as to how they will go about it. One of the reasons the audience is not convinced that the romance will work is Molly. Just as Rebecca serves as a boundary to the relationship between Sylvie and Paul, so too is Molly--Manny's daughter--a boundary in their relationship. It is because the newly widowed father needs a housekeeper that Corrina and he meet. He comes to know Corrina and have respect for her because she takes such good care of his daughter. Hence, Molly both defines and confines their relationship. They are employer and employee even in the midst of their budding romance. When Manny fires Corrina it is because she assumed too much authority over Molly. When Manny asks Corrina to come back into their lives it is because he can find no one to replace her in Molly's life or in his. Their relationship works on screen because their common interest is the little girl. Audiences are so enamored of Manny and Corrina's relationship with Molly, and Molly's enthusiasm for them, that movie is allowed to end with the

threat of Manny and Corrina's continuing their relationship. It can conclude by implying that they are together, but not by actually making it happen. Perhaps the most significant line in the movie is when Manny's mother says: "A bird and a fish can fall in love, but where will they make their nest?" Mainstream audiences can deal with innuendoes of love between the two, but do not have to negotiate them actually being together.

A case can be made for *Corrina*, *Corrina* being an exception to the rule when it comes to eradicating all traces of the Black community. After all, *Corrina* lives with her sister, brother-in-law and their three children. Yet, *Corrina* and her sister are constantly fighting because of *Corrina*'s ambitions. *Corrina* is a college graduate and wants to review Jazz music for magazines. However, she ends up working as a maid and nanny because no publication would hire a Black woman at the time. The sister sees *Corrina*'s ambition as a weakness. To her, *Corrina*'s dreams get in the way of earning a real living and remarrying and having a family. In her sister's eyes *Corrina* is a failure because she has no man and no family of her own. *Corrina* spends her free time hanging out in Jazz clubs and playing Louis Armstrong records instead of pursuing a husband and family. The only other significant conversation that takes place between *Corrina* and another Black person is one with the gentleman caller her sister invites over. In an effort to get *Corrina* dating Black men, her sister sets her up in hopes of seeing *Corrina* settle

down. Even in her own community, Corrina is already seen as strange and becomes even more of an outcast when she begins to spend her free time with Manny and Molly. Thus, while there are references to and involvement with the Black community in this movie, an appearance by the Black community is unimportant to the main narrative.

Crossing Over and Selling Out

Hollywood has devised a formula for creating and maintaining crossover stars. The most important element in their methodology is to extract the star from social and cultural entanglements. This allows the mainstream audience to view the actor only in surroundings that are familiar and comfortable to them. Mainstream cinema audiences are not invited to draw new conclusions about Black people in America if they never get to see more than one at a time in a film. Mainstream audiences do not have to question or even engage the status quo when they attend the theater. They are not urged to make queries about the lives of Black women or men, mothers or wives, husbands or children as a result of viewing the typical Hollywood film. Mainstream audiences are not really asked to examine interracial relationships in this society even after attending a Goldberg film in which she is featured in one. Removing Goldberg from the Black community completely or making her the outcast in the Black community,

and/or limiting her forays into romantic venues are the elements of her crossover success. While mainstream audiences are comfortable with this, many Black audiences understand the implications of crossing over in both films and in reality.

The Black audiences who are troubled by Goldberg's presentation as the ever nurturing Black woman may be even more troubled by mainstream cinema's reluctance to give her a husband or a family. While it may seem that racial lines and barriers crumble when Goldberg is presented in inter-racial relationships (friendly and/or romantic), it is only an illusion. This pseudo-multiculturalism can be interpreted as another facet of the cross-over formula. The cross-over formula calls for alienation, separation and even segregation of the cross-over actor. In an essay entitled "Parallel Careers: Goldberg and Poitier," Ernece B. Kelly contends that mainstream cinema's foundational formula, "Hollywood's SOP (Standard Operating Procedure)," is not usually applied in cross-over movies (49). According to Kelly, the "boy likes girl; boy romances girl--fails to apply in [Goldberg's] case" (49). I would add that even on the rare occasions that Hollywood does give her a romantic interest, the boy and girl do not end up happily ever after. Kelly further explicates the cross-over formula by noting the way in which it calls for the actors to be solely defined by their vocation. She writes:

In film after film, Goldberg is defined exclusively by her occupation, even when she's a cat burglar. There's no family, no spouse. No personal relationship to bring out fuller dimensions. As a consequence, her dark skin and dreadlocks and occasional language style are the sole African-American features she brings into her films. (49)

Thus not only does the cross-over formula call for isolation from the actor's cultural and social background, but it often privileges the occupation. The characters become what they do instead of who they are. Again, this allows the mainstream audiences to remain in their comfort zones. They are not normally called upon to understand a Goldberg character beyond her role as friend and/or outside of her occupation.

Aside from expanding the definition of the cross-over formula the Kelly article also traces a bit of the history of the cross-over star.³

The racial isolation of Goldberg's roles parallels that seen in the career of another African-American actor who was at one time both the highest paid and the most popular Black actor, Sidney Poitier. (49)

Indeed, there are many similarities between the careers of Goldberg and Poitier. For instance, the unpredictable success of their movies. Because they were limited in the kinds of roles they could play, Goldberg restricted to her role as nurturer and Poitier to his as the noble Black man, it was

³ While the Kelly essay points to Sidney Poitier as the predecessor of Goldberg in terms of cross-over stars, I include Richard Pryor and Eddie Murphy as well. While neither Pryor nor Murphy have the number of films that typifies Goldberg, nor were they ever deemed dramatic actors, I see them as definite beneficiaries/victims of Hollywood's cross-over strategies because of similarity between the kinds of roles they were offered and the kinds of roles available for Whoopi Goldberg.

difficult to tell if their movies would be hits (Kelly, 49). Another similarity between their careers was their need to gain some control over the roles they were being offered. Poitier became a director before fading from the movie screen for more than a decade and Goldberg has done everything from becoming a talk show host (who has not?) to creating her own company called One Ho Productions.

Yet another parallel between their careers is Hollywood's aversion to casting them opposite Black, romantic co-stars, and then its endorsement of a flirtation with inter-racial relationships. Two of Poitier's most famous films were *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* (1967), and *A Patch of Blue* (1965), follow the same well-traveled road as Goldberg's. *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* is more a treatise on race relations than the story of a Black man and white woman who love each other and decide to marry. *A Patch of Blue* stars Poitier in love with a blind white woman and needs no further explanation. Like the Goldberg movies of the present, Poitier as a sexual being is all but eliminated. While Poitier did star in a few films wherein his love interest is Black, his better-known works do not pair him with Black women.

Perhaps the thing that is most familiar regarding the careers of these two cross-over stars is how Hollywood's handling of them reflects the social relations of their times. In *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks*, Donald Bogle refers to Poitier as the "hero for the integrationist

age" (175). He contends that there were three reasons for Poitier's success. Firstly, was Poitier's ability to communicate the precepts of integration that both Black and white audiences could accept. Next, Poitier's success could be traced to his characterizations, which Bogle says were really caricatures. Like Goldberg's adaptation of the mammy, Poitier was still playing the tom, albeit with style and class. The last reason Bogle gives for Poitier's success is his incredible talent (175-179). The criticisms of Goldberg as a popular actress are virtually the same. However, assessments of Poitier must take into account the films wherein he is father, husband and love interests. What is noteworthy about comparisons between Poitier and Goldberg is that Poitier does move from a career built upon cross-over work to more multidimensional characterizations. Although Poitier has recently begun to act again, most criticism of his work is done in retrospect. It remains to be seen where Goldberg's future pictures will take her.

If Poitier was the symbol of integration, then Goldberg is definitely a symbol of postmodern--polyphony at its best. Goldberg, both on and off screen, has come to represent what the Black woman should be in America--at least for mainstream audiences. In her personal life, she is the epitome of "welfare to work." The story of her returning a welfare check because she had begun to make money from her acting has been retold countless times. She is the single-mother and former drug addict who successfully coped when her own 15-year-old

daughter had a baby. Goldberg is the Black woman, with dreadlocks and a Jewish name. She is pro-choice and anti-drugs. Goldberg has written a children's book, an autobiography, and co-hosts the Hollywood Squares game show. She is the everywoman who always manages to change adversity into victory, an amalgamation of all that is cool and hot--at least for mainstream audiences. Mainstream cinema and the media in general can point to Goldberg and say the American dream is still possible; in this postmodern era Black people can have their piece of the pie. Yet, this same media seems to whisper as an aside, "but only one at a time please."⁴

Thus, Goldberg is a Black woman in American who has risen from poverty to fame and fortune. Who can be more postmodern than Goldberg (except maybe Oprah)? If, according to Ben Agger in *Cultural Studies as Critical Theory*, the postmodern is characterized as rejecting theories of linear history, is discontinuous, a hodgepodge, an eclectic mix of history, culture and everything in between, then surely the poster child is Whoopi Goldberg (83-87). Surely she represents, at least in the media and all its incarnations, a postmodern woman.

Yet, critics like Toni Morrison warn against believing the hype. For Morrison, the postmodern represents an

⁴ It is interesting to note here that in the 1988 film *Colors*, starring Dennis Hopper and Sean Penn, a young Black gang member is questioned about his decision to sell drugs. As the police interrogate him and he is asked why he does not choose a different lifestyle, the young man speculates that he could always be an actor, and then asks if Hollywood is ready for two Eddie Murphys.

unwillingness to own history. In an interview in *Small Acts*, with Paul Gilroy she states:

History has become impossible for them. They're so busy being innocents and skipping from adolescence into old age. Their literature and art reveals this great rent in the psyche, the spirit. It's a big hole in the literature and art of the United States. (179)

Although the "them" in Morrison's statement is a reference to the white literati, the literature and art she refers too are certainly the domain of mainstream cinema. Like the theory of integration set forth in the films of Sidney Poitier, there are gaping holes in this presentation of a Black woman's place in postmodern society.

Perhaps the most significant problem with the promises of integration were that they were in the end available only to a few Black people. So that art really did imitate life when Poitier was the only Black doctor in a film, or his family was the only Black family to integrate a neighborhood. Thus, the promises and benefits of integration were not true for the majority of Black people. But, the most significant problem with representations of Goldberg that present her as a product of postmodernity is that it is true. If as Morrison says, the postmodern leaves holes in history, then filmic representations of Goldberg certainly do. That is why mainstream cinema audiences love her and many Black audiences do not. Cutting out the parts of history that do not appeal to mainstream audiences, cutting out the parts of current reality that do not appeal to them, is at the very heart of entertainment via the film. Unfortunately, and oftentimes the

material that is cut out is composed of the socio-cultural experiences of Black America.

Sidney Poitier was representative of integration during the 50's and 60's. During that era both Black and white audiences believed that if Black Americans could have legitimate access to power then King's dream could become reality. However, instead of universal legitimate access, a few Blacks were allowed limited access. The fact that Poitier was the most prominent among a handful of Black male stars allowed roles in Hollywood at that time is an embodiment of this limited access. Whoopi Goldberg is certainly a reflection of these postmodern times. On the surface all seems well, she is rich, famous and respected. Underneath, she has become rich, famous, and respected primarily by reviving the mammy figure.

Another similarity between the careers of Goldberg and Poitier is that they suffered in one form or another the fate of all cross-over stars. At points in their careers their Black audiences perceived them as not only crossing over, but selling out. The turning point came in Poitier's career with his 1958 film *The Defiant Ones*. In it, he and Tony Curtis are convicts who have escaped prison but who remain handcuffed to one another. Donald Bogle points to a disturbing trend that reached its climax in *The Defiant Ones*. The Poitier characterizations which had come to represent brotherly love, had begun to slip over into those depicting self-sacrifice

and even self-effacement. Bogle writes in his assessment of *The Defiant Ones*:

For, once they have been unchained, the good Poitier comes to the rescue of Curtis, not out of necessity but out of brotherly love. Again he sacrifices himself, this time not with his death but his freedom, all for the sake of his white friend. In this film, one of his biggest hits, Poitier alienated a certain segment of the audience. When he saved his honky brother, he was jeered in ghetto theaters. Black audiences were consciously aware for the first time of the great tomism inherent in the Poitier character, indeed in the Poitier image (182).

Again, what is most useful about Bogle's analysis is that he points to a period in history and in Poitier's career when Poitier is labeled a sell-out. Goldberg is no stranger to the "sell-out" criticism. She is indeed alienated from elements of the Black audience. The NAACP boycotted her first film, *The Color Purple*. While much of the criticism surrounding *The Color Purple* originally raged against Alice Walker and Steven Spielberg, Goldberg became a target when she began to bash back. The sell-out criticism directed at Goldberg was only heightened by her subsequent movie roles. Her constant portrayal of the nurturing Black woman, fixed in a white world, has firmly entrenched her in the sell-out category for many Blacks. In *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks*, Bogle refers to her as "the mighty nurturer--an updated mammy--without a life of her own" (298). He says that Hollywood's insistence on treating Goldberg as the latest rendition of the mammy has "removed her from the black community" (298).

Thus, the cross-over formula seems to eventually end with the Black audience feeling as if their Black stars have sold-out. Indeed, there is no other way it can end. In the cross-over formula there will always be films in which either the black or the white audience has to be sacrificed. Since Hollywood is in the business of making movies that make money, they will of course cater to the majority audience.

Sisters, Sista-Girls and Girl-Friends

One of the surprise cross-over films of the 1995 film season was *Waiting to Exhale*. The surprise lay not only in the fact that the film earned in excess of \$250 million dollars, but that it centered on the friendships and love lives of four Black women (Wakhisi, 28). The film was a cross-over hit in that while it targeted primarily Black audiences (Black women in particular), it caught the attention and the wallets of white female audiences. Yet, even with the phenomenal success of *Waiting to Exhale*, Hollywood was not eager to follow up this success with a string of movies featuring relationships between Black women. Hollywood did develop another of Terri McMillan's novels. The woman who penned the book *Waiting to Exhale*, also authored *How Stella Got Her Groove Back*. *How Stella Got Her Groove Back* debuted in the late summer of 1998 and starred Angela Bassett as Stella, and Whoopi Goldberg as her best friend. This seemed to be a phenomenal development in the career of

Goldberg. Goldberg has shared little screen time with other Black women, particularly where they are her close friends. While the story centers around the character of Stella, Delilah (the Goldberg character) provides the comedy. What is interesting about the decision to cast Goldberg in the role of Delilah is that she has limited screen appearance. Delilah dies midway through the movie. In addition, because this screen play is drawn from a novel it is interesting to see how the character of Delilah mutated from page to screen. In McMillian's novel Delilah is a successful art gallery owner who is happily married. In the film, she is (in typical Goldberg fashion) a loud, strange-looking window dresser.

Delilah meets Stella in Jamaica and the women set out to have a good time. While Stella meets and has a torrid affair with a 20-year-old-boy, Delilah manages to attract two retired football players whose playing days are long over. While it seems that we will indeed see a Goldberg character in a romantic relationship, or at least in a fling with a Black male character, we are again disappointed. The most Delilah allows the Black man she is seeing to do is kiss her feet. While there are numerous love scenes between Stella and her young man, the only person Goldberg gets into bed with is Stella. They lay in bed fully clothed and discuss men and old times both in Jamaica and in New York. However in New York they are both lying in Delilah's hospital bed.

Thus, even in Jamaica, on a weekend getaway with her girl friend, Goldberg is not allowed to have a relationship.

Nor is she even allowed to appear sexual. While the Angela Bassett character has numerous scenes in swim wear and running gear, Goldberg is relegated to floppy hats and black t-shirts over shorts. Even in a movie where the primary audiences is Black Goldberg is not allowed to deviate from the formula that has sold her to mainstream audiences. Nor is the Delilah character allowed to have a husband as she does in the book. In fact, when she is lying in a New York hospital dying, Stella is listed as her next of kin and her only friend. Even at her funeral, where there are a small number of eclectic attendees, there are few other Black women , and the only one whom the audience sees speak is Stella. It is as if Delilah had no real life, no other close friends in New York. This is even more strange given the fact that Stella lives in California.

Even when the audience is poised to see a real relationship, real sisterhood take place involving a Goldberg character and another Black woman, we are disappointed. While no one can deny that there are some funny scenes built around Goldberg, her character is not all that she could be. Instead of truly exploring the nuances, possibilities, and dimensions that can exists in Black female friendships the movie opts to use Goldberg for comic relief. Rather than, however briefly, explore the possibilities of a Goldberg character as married to a Black man, or even exhibiting sexuality on a an island in the tropics, the movie chooses not to explore the Goldberg character..

There are perhaps many reasons why Goldberg was chosen to portray Delilah in this film. Among the reasons are of course her phenomenal talent. However, the one of the most important reasons would have to be her cross-over appeal. Since Hollywood is first and foremost a business, their primary interest would be to promote *How Stella Got Her Groove Back* to as wide an audience as possible. While the movie's primary audience would be Black, adding Goldberg to this mix would insure at the least an interest by mainstream cinema audiences. Therefore cinematic depictions of her, even in a "Black" film, would have to be consistent with what mainstream audiences are accustomed to seeing. Thus, Goldberg and Bassett's on-screen relationship is humorous but not deeply personal and intimate. Goldberg's romantic endeavor while she is in Jamaica is little more than time spent laughing at and running from amorous clowns.

Hollywood has not been interested in presenting the strong and often invaluable relationships Black women have with one another. Like her male counterparts in her films, Goldberg's friends are almost exclusively white. She has literally had only one sister since *The Color Purple*, and in *Corrina, Corrina* her and her sister's relationship is characterized by the tension Corrina's choice of male friends produces. *How Stella Got Her Groove Back* seemed to be a departure from the nearly 40 feature films in which she has no significant relationship with another Black woman. Yet, even this film fails to satisfy. Goldberg's presence in *How*

Stella Got Her Groove Back is typical of her presence in most films. Goldberg is there to advance the narrative and the lives of any of the characters besides the one she is playing. She also appears in this movie less as an actress who can enrich the tapestry of the film, and more as a means of attracting mainstream audiences.

CHAPTER 4
MADWOMEN AND GOOD BUDDIES

Marketing Goldberg

In the late 1980's, directly following her portrayal of Celie in *The Color Purple*, Hollywood found it difficult to market Whoopi Goldberg. In fact their dilemma was threefold. Goldberg was Black, a woman, and a comedienne. It was a combination Hollywood did not traditionally welcome--unless it was packaged as the mammy figure. While most of Goldberg's characterizations do indeed represent some configuration of the mammy figure, there are a string of her movies which vary from that formulation enough to warrant their own category.

This chapter is titled "Madwomen and Goodbuddies" because it explores the strange mix of characters Goldberg portrayed before she found her niche as the 90's version of the mammy figure. *Jumpin' Jack Flash* (1986), *Fatal Beauty* (1987), *Burglar* (1987), *The Telephone* (1988), and *Homer and Eddie* (1989) are particularly representative of Hollywood's inability to create multidimensional representations of Black women. Indeed, Hollywood's handling of Goldberg in these instances exhibits a kind of confusion worth noting. While Hollywood does eventually find a place for Goldberg as the

latest rendition of the mammy figure, it is possible to see something more at work in the beginning of her film career. It is possible to trace in these early films an attempt to create characters for Goldberg that reach beyond the mammy figure. However, while it is possible to detect Hollywood's effort, its failure is even more glaring. Although, they try to present her in ways slightly more complex than the quintessential mammy--convention, tradition, and box office receipts make short work of their endeavors.

In *Feminist in the Dark*, Kathi Maio sums up Hollywood's dilemma when it came to initially marketing Whoopi Goldberg. She writes:

The trouble was they [Hollywood] had no idea what to do with her. Women comic actors of any description have it very rough in movieland. (Comedy has always been considered male turf). But a funny black woman? And this one in particular. For god's sake, the woman wears dreadlocks. If she had a long-legged perfect figure, classic (i.e. white) beauty, straightened hair, and a sultry (i.e. sexually exploitable) femininity, the studio execs would have known what to do. (78)

In the beginning of Goldberg's film career, particularly given the reception of *The Color Purple*, Hollywood was indeed perturbed and even wary about how to market Goldberg. As Maio contends, Hollywood had many obstacles to overcome in order to ensure Goldberg was a box office draw. First and foremost, no matter how funny and talented she was, Goldberg was indeed a Black woman. She was a Black woman who in no wise fit the Hollywood formula for leading ladies. Not only was she a Black-skinned, African American woman who wore her hair

natural, but one who wore her hair in "dreadlocks." Thus, there could be no "passing" for white, half-white or even Hispanic for her on screen. Like the Afro of the 1960's and 70's her hairstyle bore certain political connotations. The most popular explanation of the "dreadlock" has its roots in Rastafarianism. Rastafarians, as they called themselves, were a group of militant Jamaicans who swore their allegiance to Haile Selassie I of Ethiopia. Rastafarians, believed that Selassie was the messiah and Africa the Promised Land (Bonner, 81). Thus, Goldberg's early appropriation of this symbol as fashion would have to have been taken into consideration as Hollywood delineated a marketing strategy.

Another dilemma for Hollywood was actually Goldberg's phenomenal talent. Because she had built up a following as a comedienne, and had also proven her talent as a dramatic actress in *The Color Purple* (inspite of its mixed critical reception) they were at a loss as to how to present her. Since Goldberg would be receiving star billing they could not very well make her a prostitute or a drug addict, at least not in every film. Whores and crack heads were still the roles of choice for Black actresses at the time. Neither could the movie makers risk more controversy and the loss of box office receipts by involving her in inter-racial romances. Giving Goldberg a Black leading man would have resulted in the dreaded "Black movie." Hollywood's solution was something of a haphazard formula, a hodge-podge of characters that almost ruined Goldberg's career. Out of

Hollywood's quandary came the likes of Terri Doolittle, Rita Rizzoli, Bernie Rhodenbarr and Vashti Blue all whom wound up insane, in a lot of trouble, or in the role of "sidekick."

Good Buddies

In the summer of 1998 Hollywood marked another milestone in the production of the "Black/White/Good-Buddy/Sidekick" movie with its fourth installation of *Lethal Weapon*. *Lethal Weapon* like *48 Hours* and *Another 48 Hours*, represented a profitable and acceptable way of handling Black and white characters on screen. Usually the Good Buddy/Sidekick formula is invoked when a movie has to be made around a Black comedian. In order to alleviate inter-racial romance concerns and to avoid making a "Black movie," a white protagonist is added to the mix. Chemistry between the Black actor and the white actor is important. The audience must believe that they hate each other so much that they really like each other or that their appreciation for one another stems from a mutual respect for the way they perform their duties. No matter the intricacies of their relationships the audience must believe that if it were a perfect world this is the way Black and white men and women *should* or *could* relate to one another.

From Richard Pryor to Eddie Murphy this formula has worked in Hollywood. It even continues to work today in a new and improved multicultural form. Witness the success of the "Good-Buddy/Sidekick" movie *Rush Hour* starring the young,

Black comedian Chris Tucker, and Asian Martial Arts expert, Jackie Chan. Given this particular formula's historical and potential success, it is no wonder that Hollywood tried to develop an amalgamation of it to fit Whoopi Goldberg.

As Hollywood's premiere Black actress in the late 1980's a series of roles had to be developed for Goldberg that eliminated all of the taboo subjects. Hollywood was not interested in testing its audience's tolerance of interracial romances and were not yet aware of Goldberg's appeal as nurturer. They were also reluctant to cast another woman (Black or white) opposite Goldberg and of course could not present her with a Black male protagonist. Thus, it seemed their only recourse lay in creating another rendition of the "Good-Buddy/Sidekick" movie. Their first attempt at defining Goldberg as a Hollywood entity began with 1986's *Jumpin' Jack Flash*.

Jumpin' Jack Flash is the story of Terri Doolittle, a computer technician in a large New York bank. Terri likes to carry on personal computer chats with her overseas clients. A British spy trapped in Russia taps into her computer and the adventure begins. Before exploring the narrative further it is necessary to comment upon the way Terri Doolittle is constructed. It is significant that the naming practices as far as Goldberg characterizations are concerned, at least in this segment of her career, usually signify androgyny. In fact, the reason the British spy, Jack, even contacts Terri is that he thinks she is a man. The blatant masculinization

of her characters' names is in keeping with the way Hollywood wished audiences to perceive her. Even at this early stage in her film career Hollywood capitalizes on Goldberg's androgynous look in order to divert any thoughts of this Black woman being a "woman" on screen. The movie making machine does not want its audiences attracted to Goldberg as a woman, but rather as a comedienne. They want the audience to see past her femininity and all the implications it might conjure on screen and just see her as someone or something funny. Likewise, the androgynization of Goldberg not only prevents the audience from seeing her as desirable, but may also prevent the other characters (male and female) in the narrative from finding her physically attractive.

In *Jumpin' Jack Flash* one of Terri's acquaintances from work, a sexy blonde, is always trying to get her to go out. The contrast is apparent immediately as this character (played by Carol Kane) is constantly sharing tales of her latest sexual conquests with Terri. We know that Terri has no boyfriends because when we see her at home she is alone, watching old black and white love stories on television. The audience understands immediately that the white Blonde is the one who gets the guys and the funny looking little Black woman doesn't. This is in keeping with the movie's attempts to define Terri out of desirability. It is easy to see Carol Kane as desirable. She embodies all the signifiers. She comes to work in make-up, heels and tight dresses. Terri comes to

work in oversized black pants, plaid shirts, and yellow sneakers.

The contrast between what is desirable and what is laughable does not end with the way Terri and Cynthia (the Kane character) dress, but the way they relate with the men in the office. The men in the office flirt with and tease Cynthia, but they ask Terri for advice. Several times in the movie Terri's computer picks up a Russian television program featuring very masculine looking women in an aerobics class. The men make cat calls and sexual innuendoes toward the women on the screen, yet they ignore Terri. While it is evident that the attention given to the Russian television show is sarcastic, Terri does not garner any kind of admiration as a woman. When compared to Cynthia she is not woman enough and when considered next to the Russian women on the computer screen, who epitomize androgyny, she is still lacking.

In what is perhaps one of the most well-known scenes in all of Goldberg's movies, Terri is again set up to fail when it comes to being admired as a feminine entity. It is the scene in which Jack asks her to crash a ball at the British embassy. The heretofore boyish looking Terri Doolittle shows up at the embassy wearing a bright-blue sequined evening gown and a strawberry blonde wig. It is quite obvious that this scene is meant to paint Goldberg as the buffoon. There is nothing about her appearance that bespeaks femininity or attraction. Her manly swagger in blue high-heeled shoes is quite laughable. She is clearly out of place not only in the

Embassy, but out of place presenting herself as a desirable woman. Terri has borrowed the blue evening gown from Cynthia and it is clear that what works for Cynthia (for white women) does not work for Terri (for Black women). Terri's blue eyeshadow, red lipstick and blonde hair mimic Cynthia. Yet for Cynthia they are signs of desirability, for Terri they are further evidence of her inability to be desirable. In fact, not only do the trappings of white beauty not work on Terri, she looks like a clown for even trying. It is not only the ownership of beauty and desirability that are at stake here, but issues of access as well. The fact that Terri has to borrow Cynthia's dress and mimic her stylistically to attend a party at an embassy speaks to this power relations.

Terri must parody white beauty in order to gain access to echelons of power as well provinces of feminine beauty and desirability. However, since Terri fails at appropriating white beauty (as most physically Black women must) she becomes a spectacle. Adorning Terri's blue gown is the walkman belted around her waist. Terri then morphs from the unattractive and out-of-place woman to the Diana Ross impersonator. She goes from being unacceptable to acceptable because she is there to provide entertainment. The dress, wig, and awful makeup now become the accouterments of the entertainer and thereby acceptable. Yet, the fact that the Black woman can only enter the British Embassy as the entertainment cannot go unacknowledged. Once she tells embassy personnel that she is there to perform, she has no

problems gaining access nor does she have a problem attracting the admiration of a white male. What was inadmissible in the form of a Black woman becomes possible in her capacity as a legitimate object. After all, there is no need to take her seriously if she is only entertainment. Its permissible to laugh at her, even ridicule her, because she is not a legitimate guest and not on the same "level" as the other guests.

Terri's denotation as entertainment prevents the guest at the British Embassy from having to take her seriously. The loud dress, the loud wig, and her loud mouth prevent the audience from having to address her as a woman, and especially, a Black woman. As if the point about her lack of legitimate femininity were not taken, there is a scene in which Terri shimmies up the roof and almost falls off while in her evening gown. After accomplishing her mission in the computer room, she brushes up against a paper shredder which proceeds to pull her dress from her body. The scene is indeed comic as she struggles frantically to keep the machine from eating her dress. In the end, she leaves the embassy looking as if she had been in a fight. The once long gown now resembles little more than a loin cloth. Perhaps a Black audience would be more sensitive to the condition of her dress at this point. The loin-cloth look of what was once an evening gown comes dangerously near to evoking images of savages in the jungle. Thus after Terri's encounter with the

highest echelons of society she returns to her home looking beaten and defeated.

Again, the significance of this scene as a safety mechanism is quite obvious. Not only is Terri a terribly unattractive Black person, ala blonde wig and fire blue dress, she is equally unattractive as a woman. On her way home she is mistaken for a transvestite-prostitute. The double-entendre here is quite telling. A Black woman walking down the street dressed as she is must be a prostitute and such a masculine looking prostitute must be in actuality a man.

Jumpin' Jack Flash does a wonderful job of subverting Terri's Blackness as well as her femininity. It is as if the filmmakers intend that the audience simply look over the fact that Terri is Black. In and of itself, this prompting of the audience to be colorblind seems to promote multiculturalism, but in this instance it does not. Trivializing her ethnicity, is the same or worse than negating it, because both are done so that mainstream audiences are comfortable with or oblivious to ethnic difference on screen. It is easy not to see Terri Doolittle (and most Goldberg characters) as Black because the only thing Black about them is usually their skin-color. It is important here that I point out that I am not essentializing what it means to be Black, but pointing to Blackness as a culture predicated upon many things besides skin-color. Blackness has only to do with skin-color in so far that complexion was typically the signifier for creating

such a culture in America. While this culture materialized out of force and subsequent economic and social stratifications, the fact remains that Blackness is more than pigmentation. Thus it becomes the socio-economic and psychological structuring, as well as melanin count, that determines Blackness. Again, the reason why Goldberg does not appeal to many Black people is that she is only Black-skinned in her films' and not Black culturally, politically, historically or even socially.

This can certainly be said of the character Terri Doolittle. When *Jumpin' Jack Flash* opens the first thing that the audience sees is an indepth camera sweep of Terri's apartment. The camera roams around the modest and cluttered dwelling hesitating when it comes to the books she reads and the movies she watches. The opening scene is constructed so that we get to know something about Terri mentally before seeing her physically. The audience is introduced to Terri via movie posters. We know that she is fascinated with Classical (meaning very white) Hollywood Film. Her walls are covered with movie posters from *Metropolis*, *Attack of the 50 Foot Woman*, *The Maltese Falcon* and *Casablanca*. Her floor is littered with paperback mystery novels like *The Night She Died* and *Passage to Murder*. Before the audience ever sees Terri they somehow know her already.

The opening shot continues with Terri peaking out from under a bed covered with clothing and blankets. She gets out of bed in penguin slippers, red-checked pajamas, a black

toboggan, and a scarf. She looks, and acts, like a clown in the opening shot. After getting out of bed and banging on her radiator, the camera pauses on her scratching her backside. It is as if the movie makers cannot wait for Goldberg to be funny on her own but must inject such behavior in order to insure the audiences that they need not take her seriously.

It is possible to see emerging from her early films, beginning with *Jumpin' Jack Flash*, the filmmakers experimentation with the buffoon as a way to package Goldberg. While her talent and perhaps even the intricacies of some of the roles themselves do not contribute to her presentation as the buffoon, the way she is physically presented on screen certainly does. As the Hollywood machine found it difficult to present Goldberg to mainstream film audiences, at least before they revived the mammy, it was only natural that they experiment with the buffoon caricature. According to Donald Bogle one of the primary characteristics of the buffoon in Hollywood cinema was that he (usually) was asexual (7).

In *Jumpin' Jack Flash* it was impossible that Terri Doolittle be the typical attractive woman. There has to be some sort of buffer between her and the character of Jack. The logistics of the relationship between Terri and Jack is especially delicate because the audience is aware that Terri is alone and has no family or significant other. They also know she is a romantic and loves adventure, at least vicariously, from the movie posters on her walls. Thus it

would be logical for Terri to be infatuated with the mysterious Jack. In fact, Terri is set up throughout the movie to fall for Jack. For example, the audience is allowed to hear Jack's voice throughout the movie. We assume that we are hearing what Terri thinks his voice must be like. This is confirmed when she arrives at his apartment and checks his answering machine. Jack's voice is deep, musical, masculine, British, it makes Terri and the audience wonder what Jack must look like. The mystery is heightened by the fact that when Terri does enter his apartment there are no pictures of Jack himself. Jack's sense of humor and the desperateness of his situation comes across not only in his and Terri's computer banter, but in his voice. Any audience versed in the Hollywood Film style knows that there should be some kind of romantic encounter between Terri and Jack.

The anticipation of this encounter is exacerbated and alleviated by the computer itself. Because Terri and Jack can only communicate via cyberspace the anticipation levels are high, yet the movie is off-the-hook in terms of presenting the couple together. There are no kisses or even hand-holding scenes because Terri and Jack are conveniently on two different continents.

As the buffoon was a convenient way of presenting and containing Blackness, particularly in terms of sexuality, in early Hollywood Film it was inevitable that contemporary Hollywood would try and adapt such a reading to Whoopi Goldberg. The results were less than favorable and

contributed to the melange of characterizations in the early stages of Goldberg's career. It would take several attempts before Hollywood stumbled upon just the right mix of mammy and buffoon in order to sell Whoopi Goldberg.

On the heels of *Jumpin' Jack Flash* came 1987's *Fatal Beauty*. In a number of ways *Fatal Beauty* demonstrates most straight-forwardly Hollywood's inability to negotiate a full representation of a Black female character on screen. Goldberg appears this time as Detective Rita Rizzoli. Rizzoli is a narcotics specialist ala *Miami Vice*. Thus, she spends much of her time undercover trying to take drug dealers off the streets. While it would seem that presenting a Black woman as a police detective instead of the drug user or pusher is evidence of multidimensional characterization, this movie, like all of these early films, falls short. *Fatal Beauty* is uneven and perhaps manic in its presentation of Rizzoli. On the one hand she is positively presented as a much decorated police detective, on the other the love scene between Goldberg and Sam Elliot has been cut in order to avoid offending audiences. This kind of double-handedness is evident throughout this film.

In *Fatal Beauty*, the movie makers cannot decide if they intend to subvert stereotypical renderings of Black women or perpetuate them. For instance, the first time we see Rizzoli she is striding down the street dressed as a hooker. Her red wig and yellow mini-dress are almost neon signs. She is even more of a spectacle than the "real" prostitutes she passes on

the street. Rizzoli is undercover and attempting to capture a drug dealer. However, she interrupts her sting operation in order to rescue a prostitute who is being beaten by her pimp. The pimp turns on Rizzoli and punches her in the face and kicks her repeatedly. All the while he is beating Rizzoli, he is punctuating his blows with choruses of "nigger" and "bitch." When she is finally able to best her attacker, Rizzoli delivers what will be her signature line throughout the movie, "don't call me bitch." The character does not express rage at being called nigger, but at being called bitch. It is noteworthy, that the pimp beats both women unmercifully, but while he refers to the white prostitute as bitch, he calls the Goldberg character a "nigger-bitch." It is significant that Rizzoli overlooks being called a nigger, but zeroes in on being called a bitch. Since Rizzoli can ignore the connotations of being called a nigger this invites the audience to do so as well. Perhaps the filmmakers are concerned about referring to women as bitches, but are not perplexed at referencing Blacks as niggers.

This opening scene sets the stage for the kind of racial and gender imbalances that appear throughout this movie. For example, shortly after her beating in the ally, Rizzoli is called by two homicide detectives to identify a murder victim. From the moment she arrives on the scene, she is the brunt of both chauvinist and racist jokes. One of the homicide detectives greets her by saying, "Here comes the dusky little dic." The other policeman follows suit by asking

if she knows where they can find a good maid. They make a bet with Rizzoli that she can't identify the badly mutilated body of the victim. One of the detectives says, in reference to how she should pay him if she loses, "fifty bucks this time, no food stamps." The two detectives become extreme in what they believe is funny when they see the Goldberg character bend over. One of them says: "Stay bent over like that and I'll show you a good time . . . you ever get it doggy style." It is obvious that Rizzoli is fair game not simply because she is a woman but because she is Black. The two men seem oblivious to the fact that their sexual comments are predicated upon the fact that they are referring to a Black woman and not just a whitewoman. Consequently, the racial and sexual innuendoes are inseparable. This is why when the Goldberg character decides to ignore the racist slurs it becomes glaringly apparent. Thus, Rizzoli's attempt to verbally defend herself against sexist comments proves ineffectual. Such comments are both sexist and racist.

It is not just among her own colleagues that Rizzoli is disrespected as a Black woman. There are many people in the movie who feel they have a right to subject her to cruelty, especially because she is a Black woman. For example, when the Goldberg character stops after work to get a sandwich, an enraged teenager (the friend of someone she has arrested for selling drugs) accosts her. The boy says to her:

I know where you live. I am going to break into your apartment, kick your ass and then maybe I'll fuck you for dessert.

Rizzoli is either threatened physically or sexually throughout this movie by white men. Even in the final scene when she finally confronts one of the major drug dealers the emphasis is on the criminal. She shoots the man until she runs out of bullets. Instead of dying he continues to advance toward her hurling insults all the while. Although she is the one who represents the law, somehow Rizzoli becomes the hunted, the one whose life is in danger. When her gun is empty the drug dealer rips open his shirt to expose a bullet proof vest. He then tells the "bitch" that he is going to kill her. In the macho style typical throughout the movie, Rizzoli explains that she does not like being called a bitch and fires at him with her extra gun.

While it is true that the character Goldberg plays is a police detective and can expect hazard in her line of work, the supporting characters in this movie seem to get particular pleasure out of expressing a need to subdue her both psychologically and sexually. They also seem to get some kind of pre-game excitement by explaining to her exactly what they will do beforehand. This kind of treatment was also apparent with Terri in *Jumpin' Jack Flash*. Terri is dragged down the street in a telephone booth, has to jump from a moving taxi, is shot with a tranquilizer gun, has her dress torn from her body by a paper shredder, is thrown into a river, barely escapes having her fingers severed with an electric saw, and has to bite the testicles of a man who has

a gun to her head, all in the course of a two hour movie. This is hardly typical treatment for a Hollywood leading lady. For the Goldberg films prior to her role in *Clara's Hart*, this kind of treatment seems par for the course. There is an aggression toward these characters that seems abnormal for a female lead in a Hollywood Film. It is as if Hollywood filmmakers are trying to capitalize on Goldberg's androgyny by making her the recipient of so many fist fights, and diminish her ethnicity either by making it the subject of hackneyed jokes or ignoring it altogether. Thus, it is possible to see a pattern emerging in these early Goldberg movies. This pattern is a jumble of racists, sexists, misogynistic stereotypes. Hollywood is not sure if they want Goldberg to be the androgynous strange woman forever falling into mayhem, or a knockoff of the jezebel. Whatever is going on in the mind of the filmmaking machine at this point, it is still not sure what to do with Goldberg. Perhaps this is why *Fatal Beauty* contains her most controversial romance to date.

Following *The Color Purple*, Whoopi Goldberg did not star in any Hollywood films wherein her significant interest was a Black man. Rizzoli's relationship with Marshack (Sam Elliot) would seem the only opportunity to stretch a Goldberg characterization into one depicting a love relationship.⁴

⁴I am aware of Goldberg's role in 1998's *How Stella Got Her Groove Back*. Yet, even in this film, while Delilah (Goldberg) is in the company of Black men, they are peripheral characters. They are the brunt of jokes between Stella and her and not taken seriously.

However, inspite of its hopeful moment this connection in *Fatal Beauty* is only half-heartedly attempted.

Rizzoli is after Kroll, a respected business man, whose sideline is peddling drugs. Not only is Kroll selling drugs, but he is selling "Fatal Beauty" which is killing its users. Mike Marshack is Kroll's security chief. Marshack asserts that he only handles Kroll's legitimate business interests and turns a blind-eye to the other half of the business. In order to keep tabs on Rizzoli, Kroll assigns Marshack the task of following her. In the midst of his duties Marshack finds himself constantly saving Rizzoli's life. It is a mystery how she ever survived before he came on the scene. Nevertheless, as the two spend more and more time together their exchange of raillery and witticisms becomes something more. In one such exchange, Rizzoli invites Marshack into her apartment for coffee. When she asks him how he likes it, he of course says black. The atmosphere between the two of them changes from civil to very friendly. When Rizzoli receives a phone call telling her that three children are dead from consuming *Fatal Beauty*, Marshack steps in to comfort her.

In a scene curiously reminiscent of *Clara's Hart*, Rizzoli explains to Marshack why she sees it as her responsibility to rid the streets of drugs. While he sits in a chair she sits on her coffee table facing him. The camera moves in for a close-up and a shot of their heads fill the screen. Rizzoli begins by telling him how ugly she was as a child and how drugs made her feel pretty and accepted. She

relates how she became pregnant at fourteen and a full-fledged junkie. Subsequently, her young child is found dead in pool because she got into Rizzoli's drug stash. At this point in the tale Rizzoli dissolves into tears and Marshack takes her into his arms to comfort her.

The very next camera shots are of a tousled bed, a ringing phone, and steam coming from the shower. The implications here are evident. Rizzoli's confession has led to a kind of consummation of her relationship/friendship with Marshack. This in and of itself is typical Hollywood fare and would seem that Hollywood is affording Goldberg the same treatment as any of its other female leads. However, there is much that is different in this scene from most of the others Hollywood would typically produce. The confession scene is much like one scene in *Clara's Hart*, when Clara tells David that she was raped by her own son. As in *Clara's Hart*, the two sit close together and the audiences sees a series of reverse headshots. Although Rizzoli and Marshack are sitting closer than Clara and David, the set up and subsequent shot-reverse-shot sequence is the same. The camera moves from both of their heads in the frame, to one or the other. What is significant is that it is Marshack's face and reaction we see rather than, or more than, Rizzoli's grief at the loss of her child. This scene yields the same results as the confession scene in *Clara's Hart*. Rather than identify with the Goldberg character, the audience is encouraged to identify with the white male character. In *Clara's Hart* this type of editing

shifts the film from a story about a Black woman and the loss of her son to a coming-of-age story for a young, white, male. In *Fatal Beauty*, while the emphasis of the entire film does not change the emphasis of the scene does. The way this scene is edited moves the audience from empathy with Rizzoli to empathy with Marshack. Rather than feeling compassion for Rizzoli, the audience is applauding Marshack for his willingness and his ability to comfort the woman. We no longer see the Goldberg character and her pain, rather we see the white male character and his solicitude. Which is precisely why this scene does not strongly support a romantic relationship between the two even though they sleep together.

Underscoring the fact that it is her story we hear but his reaction we see, is the question of whether or not the Sam Elliott character feels passion or compassion for Goldberg. Since the now infamous love scene was cut out of this movie we are left only with what happens immediately before and after it. We hear Goldberg tell the intimate and horrible details of her baby's death while the camera lingers on Marshack's face. He puts his arms around her and looks as if he is compelled to comfort her. Immediately afterward, the camera opens on the unmade bed and we hear Goldberg from the shower call for Marshack to answer the phone. The camera pans around the empty bed as well as the empty bedroom. The movement of the camera, the bed, Rizzoli's exit from the shower, and her entreaties for "Mike" to answer the phone all

infer that he has spent the night with her.⁵ Yet, what is also glaringly apparent is that Marshack is gone. He has obviously left while Rizzoli was in the shower, and he has left without saying good-bye. This kind of finale to the missing love scene works against it as a scene connoting intimacy. The audience is welcomed to infer from his hasty departure that Marshack is sorry he stayed, that it was a mistake, or that he was simply trying to comfort Rizzoli.

The removal of the love scene itself and the subsequent publicity it garnered also work against Goldberg's depiction as a Black woman character with a love-interest. While it may not be unusual for the woman to wake up in a Hollywood film alone the morning after, it is unusual for the man to have left while she was in the shower and without leaving some kind of memento. The filmmakers miss an opportunity to treat Goldberg just like any other Hollywood leading-lady by making the motivation behind their affair a mystery. While such a scenario would barely raise an eye in another movie, the implications are far reaching in this one. If there is one stereotypical image of the Black woman that rivals that of the mammy in Hollywood Film, it is that of the Black whore. When Marshack sleeps with Rizzoli and then leaves without any communication between the two of them, it can easily be read in the negative. I am not advocating that a multidimensional depiction of a Black woman character would

⁵It is interesting to note that Rizzoli has begun to call Marshack by his first name after their night together. He will continue to call her Rizzoli throughout the movie.

automatically rule out depicting her involvement in a one night stand. I am saying however, that given the frequency with which Black women are depicted as prostitutes, projecting such an image does have implications. In short, leaving the Goldberg character alone in that way can readily imply that their affair meant very little to Marshack. The fact that he is white and that she is Black only adds to the implication. Interracial relationships are rare on screen and rarer still are those depicting white men and Black women. In fact, the only visual medium in which such imagery usually abounds is in any mimicking the antebellum period in America's history. Thus, filmmakers whether they aware of it or not, whether they intend to or not, evoke certain historical memories when they attempt intimate relationships between white men and Black women on screen. The fact that there is little evidence of genuine affection between Rizzoli and Marshack only augments these historical memories.

Even the Rizzoli character herself thinks that Marshack has only used her. When she first sees him again after their night together, even though he is once again saving her life, she punches him in the face. Yet, he saves her life once more before the movie ends. Perhaps the filmmakers attempt to assuage our fear when, at the end of the film, Rizzoli kisses Marshack. It is evident that Marshack is going to jail after recovering from his bullet wound. Rizzoli declares that she will be waiting for him when he gets out. He is conveniently wounded so that all he can do is lie there, he cannot embrace

her or return her kiss. In the final scene, over which the credits role, we see a pink Mustang being driven by a white man with a Black woman sitting in the passenger seat. This is obviously the same car that Rizzoli has driven throughout the movie. It seems as if the two are finally together again only we cannot be sure who is truly in the car.

There is a behind-the-head shot which moves to an aerial shot of the car. The audience never sees the two passengers faces, and we can only assume that they are Rizzoli and Marshack. There are many missed opportunities to assure the audience of the legitimacy of their relationship in this film. Given the decision to cut their love scene, the audience is never really sure about the nature of their commitment. It is reminiscent of *Corrina, Corrina* in that there are more questions left unanswered than answered. While it is not necessary that the characters declare their love for one another or even hold hands, it doesn't seem too much to depict a medium-close-up shot of them as they drive off into the night. Usually such a shot in a Hollywood film insures the audience that the protagonists do indeed continue their romance after the film ends.

Summarily, there is undeniable chemistry between Sam Elliot and Whoopi Goldberg which the filmmakers seem all too happy to verbally explore. Yet, when it comes to physically depicting Goldberg in a romantic situation the attempt falters. There is too much ambiguity in the relationship between Rizzoli and Marshack. Usually, such innuendo would

not change the meaning of how the audience might interpret the relationship between the characters on screen. But, usually, the leading-lady would not be a Black woman who has constantly been referred to as a "nigger" and a "bitch" throughout the movie. The lack of definitiveness in the script and on the part of the filmmakers permits the opportunity for cliché. *Fatal Beauty* leaves the interpretation of the romantic relationship to the audience. The difficulty with this is that without specific prompting from the movie itself, audiences will more than likely revert to reading a Black woman with a white male on screen in the way in which they are most familiar.⁶ The most familiar image of the Black woman who is involved with a white male is that she is a prostitute, particularly promiscuous, or in some form or fashion his property. This "Keptwoman" interpretation is supported in the scene when Marshack buys Rizzoli a dress. He visits her in the hospital after she is recovering from having a roof fall on her. Marshack offers her a five-thousand dollar dress . Given this kind of scene, the audience perceives Goldberg and the characters she plays as unimportant.

⁶An example of the usual assumptions made about Black women is evident in a scene from *Jumpin' Jack Flash*. Terri Doolittle has just witnessed the murder of one of the British agents. When she tries to tell the police about it, they assume that a Black out alone at night is a prostitute, and they discount her story.

Spy, Detective, Burglar

Hollywood's next attempt to cast Goldberg in a movie resulted in 1987's *Burglar*. *Burglar* demonstrates that same strangeness and ambiguity in the presentation of her character, as well as the same need to verbally abuse her. What is different about this movie is the way in which her ethnicity is addressed. Blackness is less of a marker for difference and more an opportunity to make fun of that difference.

Bernie Rhodenbarr is a convicted cat burglar who does not see recidivism as an option. However, Bernie is blackmailed by a corrupt police detective into returning to her life of crime. He has enough evidence against her from a previous burglary to send her back to jail. In order to pay the detective his hush money, Bernie sees one last robbery as her only recourse. Yet, as Hollywood would have it Bernie's intended victim is murdered while she hides in his closet. The police then suspect Bernie of not only robbery but murder as well. Thus *Burglar* is the tale of how Bernie goes about proving her innocence while running from the entire San Francisco Police Department.

The movie opens with a shot of a Black maid getting off a bus in a wealthy neighborhood. Bernie has disguised herself as a maid in order to enter a rich man's home and rob it. It is noteworthy that Bernie chooses to cloak herself as a maid

in order to be inconspicuous in this neighbor. In order to legitimize her access to one of the homes, she dresses as a maid. She does not dress as like a jogger or a business woman, or even a delivery truck driver. None of these characters would look out of place in such an opulent neighborhood unless, of course, they were Black. She even manages elude the owner of the house upon his return. She screams hysterically and pretends she has seen a real thief leaving the house. As the heavily padded Goldberg screams and her eyes bulge, it is impossible not to think of the mammy and as the buffoon. But her dissemblance saves her from the angry owner who runs past her chasing the imaginary criminal.

One of the interesting aspects concerning this movie is way in which the corrupt policeman treats Bernie. Here again is a white man intent on beating-up the Goldberg character. Ray not only threatens Bernie with a return to prison but attacks her physically. In the midst of their fist fight, we learn that she was the state prison boxing champion. Bernie ends up breaking the man's nose. There is a constant emphasis on the Goldberg character as masculine/androgynous. Unlike *Jumpin' Jack Flash* or *Fatal Beauty* where the Goldberg characters exhibited at least some interest in the opposite sex there is no hint of such proclivities in this movie. "Bernie" is quite androgynous even down to her nickname.

Perhaps the deliberate focus on Goldberg as a masculine-woman allows her character to be treated so roughly without fearing any concern from the audience. By the end of the

movie Bernie has found the real murderer and he tries to stab her with an ice pick. Not long after this he tries to drown her. When his drowning attempt fails they resort to fighting it out like real men. Certainly there is a discernable pattern in her early film roles that shows a blatant disregard, and perhaps even a fetish, for the physical abuse of the Goldberg character. The fact that she always fights back seems to give the abusive men in these movies even more reason to hit her. Or, it is, perhaps, Goldberg's androgynous persona that gives the filmmakers enough reason to present her in such scenarios? No matter the reasoning behind her numerous fist-fights and the many ceilings and shelves that fall on her, no matter how many times she jumps from a moving car or is dragged down the street in a phone booth, there appears a definite wish to physically assault her.

As I stated previously, the fact that Bernie is Black is handled a bit differently in this movie than in the other two mentioned. In *Jumpin' Jack Flash* the fact that Terri is Black is so meticulously ignored, it is nearly erased (at least as much as is possible in film). In *Fatal Beauty*, Rizzoli's ethnicity is at constant issue. She is the brunt of every old joke and stereotypical image. *Burglar* is different in that it does not avoid issues of race, nor seemingly evoke racist ideology. Instead *Burglar* attempts to foreground issues of race and even make fun of them. For example, it is apparent that Goldberg has blue contact lenses throughout the movie. While this seems a small matter, she wears blue contact

lenses during the same period when Spike Lee and her many other critics rail at her for doing so. So Bernie Rhodenbarr spends the entirety of the film in bright blue contact lenses and no one in the diegetic space ever mentions them. Another way in which racial difference in this film is flouted is the character Carl played by Bobcat Goldthwaite. Carl, the dog groomer, is Bernie's best friend. When he is taken down to police headquarters and questioned as to Bernie's whereabouts, his response is perhaps the most unique in the history of interrogation scenes. As the police question Carl, he screams: "I know why you're doing this to me. It's because I am a black man in a white man's world." What is quite humorous and most intriguing about his statement is that Carl is not Black, as the police quickly inform him. His statement is indeed a hit at both law enforcement and Black men. The blatant way in which Carl deems the police to treat Black men unfairly is replete with hidden meaning. The Goldthwaite character could indeed be making a bold statement about the inequalities inherent in law enforcement as it pertains to Black men, or he could be leveling the charge that every Black man questioned by the police uses race to infer unfair treatment. Yet another twist on his declaration could be that the white male is only protesting being *treated* like a Black man. Whatever the intention of this particular scene it forces the audience to reconsider the signifiers we've built into race.

All of these early Goldberg movies exhibit some form of discord when it comes to presenting ideas of ethnicity and femininity. *Burglar* is unique in that it performs this uneasiness even more so in its handling of race. While on the one hand the movie pokes fun at notions of difference by the very act of foregrounding them, on the other it has important moments when it reverts back to stereotypical interpretations of Blackness. From the opening scene that shows Goldberg heavily padded about the breasts and hips to the dentist's (Leslie Ann Warren) accusation that Bernie must have killed her ex-husband because, afterall, Bernie is a "Black woman," convention rises up to haunt the movie. Thus, it would seem that just when one can make a case for *Burglar's* handling of race as insightful it, like the other films, opts for the easy racial stereotype.

Mad About My Buddy

Inherent within all of these movies is the notion of Goldberg as the crazy woman. She is mad in the sense that she is always a bit crazy in these movies. When Goldberg is the good-buddy of a white man there are several things that are consistent throughout the storyline. She is indeed different from what would be considered normal in society as is evidenced in *Jumpin' Jack Flash*, *Fatal Beauty*, and *Burglar*. For example, she is the narcotics investigator obsessed with single-handedly cleaning up the streets. She is the lonely, computer operator longing for a mystery in her real life like the ones she reads about in her novels or watches on television. Goldberg plays the ex-cat burglar and boxer turned bookstore owner. No matter the particular plot of the film the Goldberg character is usually significantly different from most ordinary women, Black or otherwise, on-screen or off. This tendency to present her as a bit mad is the strategy that has proved successful in presenting her to mainstream film audiences. It has not only worked in and off itself, but has also been the foundation of her "buddy" movies. The premise is that it is perfectly acceptable to have Goldberg play a character who is the friend of a white man, as long as she is too crazy to be his lover.

Perhaps the movie that best typifies Goldberg as the crazy friend of a white male is *Homer and Eddie*. *Homer and*

Eddie is a little known film released just prior to Goldberg's winning the Academy Award for her performance in *Ghost*. In many ways the relationship between Homer (Jim Belushi) and Eddie (Goldberg) is similar to that of Oda Mae (Goldberg) and Sam (Patrick Swayze) in *Ghost*. In each of these films the Goldberg character is labeled crazy and exists seemingly to further the development of the white male character--even if he is dead. Yet *Homer and Eddie* is unique in that Eddie is not just conveniently labeled crazy, but is a bonified escapee from a mental institution.

In order to prevent any notions of romance between Homer and Eddie not only is Eddie an escaped mental patient but Homer has the mind of a fourteen-year-old child. Homer was hit in the head by a baseball as a child and could never mentally progress beyond the day of the accident. We meet him as he is hitch-hiking his way home to see his parents whom have not visited him in twenty years. When Homer meets Eddie they become fast friends. Homer has been robbed of all of his money and Eddie assumes responsibility for their care. While they are two supposedly inept misfits traveling the road together they manage quite well to get into serious trouble.

Homer soon discovers that his new friend Eddie has trouble with fits of rage. A loud television, an airplane flying overhead, many things make the Goldberg character explode into anger. When she is upset Eddie hurts either herself or other people. There are several occasions wherein Homer has to restrain her to keep her from seriously hurting

herself. Eddie's condition also causes her to have very little conscious. In order to support Homer and herself, she robs gas stations and with little or no provocation and often shoots the clerks. Yet, in the midst of their adventures on the road Homer and Eddie manage to become good friends.

Because Homer has led a very sheltered life and is quite innocent, Eddie makes it her business to educate him. She teaches him to drive and takes him to a bordello so that he can have his first sexual experience. What is significant about this turn of events in the movie is that Eddie takes Homer to a prostitute who also happens to be her cousin. When she discovers that Homer is a virgin, Eddie takes a detour from their journey and stops by her cousin's place of employment. Her cousin Esther is an older, corpulent, Black woman whose love scene with Homer borders on the ridiculous. In fact, it is not a love scene at all but rather the two of them dancing in their underwear. This even gives rise to the question of whether they have actually had sex.

It is obvious that the filmmakers want to waylay any possibility of Homer having a real sexual attraction to either of the Black women in this film. The audience is made to feel as if Eddie has practically forced Homer to undergo the procedure of losing his virginity. Her behavior is a bit strange given that as close as Eddie and Homer grow in this film there is never any indication that they are sexually attracted to one another. The entrance of Esther as Eddie's cousin is quite unnecessary unless Esther is the sexually

expressed half of Eddie. It is possible to see Eddie's taking Homer to her cousin as Eddie's only sexual access to Homer. Eddie has sex with Homer vicariously through his relationship with her cousin. Thus the sexual relationship between Homer and Esther is presented as inept and comical in order to dispense with any reading of it as permanent and, thereby, threatening. There is little chance that the audience will view this particular sexual relationship as a loving, romantic union.

Murder introduces another turn of events that comment on Homer's experience with Esther. Eddie robs a store and kills the owner to get the money to pay for Homer's time with Esther. While the whole premise of the movie is that Eddie is crazy, it is indeed odd that she had rather kill than just have sex with Eddie herself. With the exception of *Fatal Beauty*, Goldberg is usually casts as asexual. Even when she is crazy and her potential partner is mentally challenged the filmmakers choose to have her commit murder rather than sleep with a man. However, they do allow white Homer to sleep with a Black Esther because she is a prostitute, she poses no problem. This film seems to say that it is perfectly okay for a Black woman to be friends with a white man as long as she is too crazy to be considered his love-interest. However, the white male character can indeed sleep with a Black female character but she can in no way threaten him in terms of establishing a relationship outside of the physical.

Eddie kills twice in the movie and does not display remorse for her crimes. She only becomes distressed when Homer threatens to leave her and subsequently promises not to kill again.. However, this is an impossible promise if Eddie is killing because she is mentally imbalanced. Yet, despite her mental instabilities Eddie has enough wit to paint the car they are traveling in and change the license plates. She is well aware that the police will be looking for them. Nevertheless, Eddie manages to keep her promise to Homer and does not kill anyone else.

Homer and Eddie is unique in that we see more of a Goldberg character's family than in most of the other films. On their way to Oregon to see Homer's parents, Eddie decides to stop in Oakland and see her own mother. Instead of going to a home or a work place, Eddie stops at a bar to look for the mother whom she has not seen in ten years. Eddie asks a patron where her mother can be found and is directed to the local cemetery. Eddie and Homer search the dark graveyard looking for her mother's headstone. They do find the headstone but they also find her mother sitting on it.

It is obvious that Eddie expected to find her mother dead but is pleased to find her among the living. Linda is a broken, old-woman, who herself seems to have slipped into insanity. She sits in a graveyard on top of her own head stone waiting to die. She has marked the stone with her name and the dates June 18, 1929 to June 18, 1989. The woman is sure that she will die on her birthday, so she sits and

waits. Her only company is an empty liquor bottle. Linda asks Eddie if she has been cured of the brain tumor that sent her to the institution and Eddie says yes. In the course of their brief conversation, Eddie absolves her mother of any guilt. The mother can die knowing Eddie doesn't blame her for sending Eddie to an institution.

This is the only Goldberg vehicle wherein her character interacts with a mother. The two have little to say to one another, but it is apparent that life has been difficult for both of them. It is also ironic that Eddie is the one in the institution while her "sane" but apothetic mother awaits death. As the mother and daughter hover at the grave site they are the reflection of the other. This is especially true when Eddie reveals to Homer that she has broken out of the institution because they told her she would soon die. Eddie's tumor is growing and the results are terminal. Thus, she has come back to tell her mother good-bye, but her mother has already left on her own journey. When Eddie wants to stay and be held by her mother, Linda screams for her to leave. Linda also shouts to Homer that he take care of her little girl, then she covers her head and returns to her vigil.

The cemetery scene is strange as is most of this movie. Like the addition of Eddie's cousin the prostitute, it seems out of place. Nothing has changed as a result of Eddie's seeing her mother. Superficially, the conversation Eddie has with her mother is only minimally informative. We do learn a little about Eddie and understand her character a bit more

since meeting her mother. We can assume that Linda is an alcoholic because Eddie looks for her in a bar and finds her with an empty liquor bottle. Another safe supposition is that Linda could not help or control Eddie. They mention "the trouble" Eddie had as a child as if the only recourse was to institutionalize her. Linda's subsequent question, "Did they fix you?" is also a clue as to the kind of relationship Eddie and her mother must have had. However, these are only clues. Important questions are left unanswered and the audience leaves the graveyard scene almost as confused as when they entered.

The basic premise of this chapter is that beyond the mammy caricature Hollywood had difficulty casting. This is apparent in the opportunities to cast Goldberg in multidimensional roles and Hollywood's subsequent failure to do so. *Homer and Eddie* is a lost opportunity. Eddie comes home to her mother because she needs help. Given her escape from a mental institution and the two murders, one of the last places Eddie should try to return to is her home. Yet, home is the place both she and Homer are trying to reach throughout the film. Homer is going home to start over. Eddie is going home to die.

Black women in this country have a cultural legacy which tells them to look to their communities, their families, and in particular to their mothers, when they are confused and/or under duress (Hill-Collins, 118). Eddie is both of these things given her terminal diagnosis and the chaotic results

of her flight. Eddie is trying to get home, to her mother because she needs help. She needs help coping and perhaps help dying. When she arrives her mother cannot give her this help because she is also mentally incapacitated. In most Goldberg movies, her character experiences this type of isolation. Usually this isolation is ignored or utilized for the advancement of the white characters. However, her separation here will kill her just as Linda's separation has her sitting on her grave stone waiting to die.

The movie makers have an opportunity to explore a dynamic characterization of a Black woman when they introduce Goldberg as an escaped mental patient. Representing a Black woman as insane--in the way that they present Goldberg--evokes both historical and cultural history that can alienate a Black audience. It is and has been widely accepted mythology among Black people that Blacks do not "go crazy." Black people have historically seen their survival of slavery as evidence that they are too strong mentally to "break down." Other factors that have traditionally accounted for Black people's mental tenacity is that they cannot afford (financially) to break down or do not have the time. While this kind of lore still permeates many Black psyches, Black fiction (along with reality) begs to differ. Yet, even when Black women do break down in fiction, the community is seen as the answer to their re-membering. For instance, in Toni Cade Bambara's *The Salt Eaters*, Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, and Gloria Naylor's *Mama Day*, (just to name a few) all of the

protagonist overcome or combat insanity by returning to their communities.

This is not the case with Eddie in *Homer and Eddie*. There is neither a solution to, nor a cure for, Eddie's brain tumor. She is not connected to a Black community or a Black tradition of nurturing that can collectively heal her. Perhaps this is why it is a brain tumor and not just that she is "insane." There can be no redemption for Eddie because it might lead to a deeper relationship between the Goldberg character and the audience, and a deeper relationship between Eddie and Homer. Having Eddie live would also lead to questions about her paying for her crimes. Goldberg plays the good guy in her films and is usually not antagonistic. It must be a brain tumor so that the audience resigns itself to Eddie's death beforehand. The audience can excuse her committing cold-blooded murder because she is sick and she is going to die anyway. Thus, miscegenation is never a threat and retribution for Eddie's crimes is never an issue. Nor is the audience forced into a relationship with Goldberg that they have never experienced. In short, Goldberg is crazy because she is sick and that's permissible for the audience.

While *Homer and Eddie* does not allow Eddie to find solace in her family or community, the filmmakers do introduce an element of salvation in the story. When Eddie kills the second gas station attendant Homer makes her go to church and confess. Homer says to her, "You kill everybody. Ask God to forgive you." Homer threatens to leave Eddie if

she doesn't have a priest absolve her, so off to confession they go. Homer makes Eddie swear never to kill again.

As soon as they arrive in Homer's town, Eddie sees a man dressed as Jesus carrying a cross. Eddie becomes excited and sets out to find this Jesus. Although she never says why, it becomes extremely important for Eddie to find Jesus. However, salvation for Eddie is elusive. She is always catching glimpses of him just as he turns a corner. Eddie cannot convince Homer that what she is seeing is real. She chases Jesus everytime she sees him, but can never catch him.

In the end, Eddie does finally get to see the man dressed in long robes and carrying a cross, but it is too late. Once Eddie sees Homer's old friends and community accept him back, she feels out of place. Before leaving town, she drops Homer's suitcase and all the money she has with one of Homer's friends. In the throes of one of her headaches, she stops at a convenience store for aspirin. She empties her pockets looking for money and realizes that she has left it all with Homer. Eddie is the picture of desperation as she bargains feverously with the clerk to just sell her just one aspirin. In searching for her money, she pulls her gun out of her pocket and the clerk thinks he is being robbed. She tries to tell him that she is not robbing him, but he pushes money into her hands and begs her to leave. On her way out the door Eddie turns around to explain herself, but the clerk shoots. Homer, who has been searching for Eddie, arrives just in time to see her stumble out of the store and on to the sidewalk.

As she lies dying in Homer's arms, the man dressed as Jesus appears. Bystanders explain that he is a crazy person who wanders the town believing he is Jesus. Eddie's last words remind Homer that she did really see Jesus.

For Eddie there is no salvation. In the end, neither her community or family or even Jesus himself can rescue her. She dies on the street, shot as an armed robber. Perhaps Eddie's determination to find Jesus is meant to comfort the audience given the austere ending. Eddie could not have been all that bad or totally crazy since she went running through the streets looking for the Christian symbol of repentance. Although she loses her life, audiences are consoled by the fact that there was a redemptive quality in Eddie's character. There was something in her that wanted to "Ask God to forgive" as Homer stated.

Another film in which Goldberg is insane is *The Telephone*. This film was pulled from movie theaters after it opened to terrible reviews. Directed by Rip Torn and starring Goldberg performing ten characters, *The Telephone* was box-office poison. Even on home video it is perhaps one of Goldberg's least known and least liked films. This film was released in 1988 just prior to *Clara's Hart*. Goldberg plays Vashti Blue, a struggling and lonely actress whose only link to the "real" world is her telephone. The majority of the movie takes place inside Vashti's apartment and most of the action or rather interaction is of her talking on the telephone. The only other people who appear on screen are her

ex-manager, who drops by with his girlfriend, and the telephone repair man. Vashti does have a recurring argument with her neighbor who remains offscreen. We hear the neighbor yelling and beating on the wall while the Goldberg character returns an even louder even louder response.

One of the reasons the film is difficult to watch is that Goldberg is mostly responsible for carrying the piece. While she is no stranger to one-woman shows and she cut her teeth as a stand-up comedienne, it is extremely difficult to carry on a monologue in an almost two-hour film. There is no audience response or interaction and the lines become stale and boring.

Even when Vashti tries to upset her neighbor by pretending that she (Vashti) is a room full of people, it does not work. In response to her neighbor's complaints about the noise and constant declarations that Vashti is crazy, Vashti pretends she is giving a dinner party. She assumes the roles of all the characters at the dinner party. She is herself, Leroy, the Queen, an opera singer, and a critic, just to name a few. While it is possible to see her shift into the different personalities, the presentation is so manic that the audience becomes lost. Goldberg's performance degenerates into so much noise it is easy to believe Vashti is crazy.

The hook that is supposed to make *The Telephone* work does not surface until the very end of the film. Often audiences do not make it this far through the film. Besides

performing all of the guests at her imaginary dinner party, Vashti's only other significant performance is talking on the telephone. Vashti speaks to the police department, the video store, the telephone company, and her girlfriend. She plays the tape of all of her received messages so her girlfriend can determine if one of the unidentified callers is indeed Vashti's husband. Vashti tells the friend that her husband left because he could not handle Vashti's success. At the end of the film, a representative from the telephone company arrives to pick up her phone. Vashti becomes erratic and pleads with the man not to take her phone. She tells him that the phone is her lifeline. At that, the man explodes with laughter and tells her that she is crazy. He tells her that her telephone service has been disconnected for two months, he is only there to pick up the telephone unit. This is absurd given the fact that the audience has been listening to Vashti's almost two-hour long telephone conversations. At this moment, the audience realizes that everything they have assumed about Vashti is false. We conclude that she must indeed be crazy. Our suspicions are confirmed when, in a fit of rage and desperation, Vashti stabs the man who tries to take her phone. The man grabs his chest and falls to the floor. His last line is also the question the audience wants to ask: "You would kill me for a telephone?" After the man dies Vashti sits down and dials the phone. She talks to the same officer she supposedly talked to earlier in the evening. She tells the officer to come to her house because she has

been a bad girl. The last shot is of Goldberg holding the zebra-striped telephone, looking directly into the camera.

While *The Telephone* is not a successful film, it does point to the difficulty Hollywood had casting Goldberg prior to *Clara's Hart*. Once again we see a Black female character who is cut off from family and community. However, in this film the character is alienated from all people. Since we know that her phone has been off for two months, we can surmise that her husband has been gone for at least that long. We are left to wonder about the "best friend" that we hear her call. Vashti Blue seems to be the result of complete separation from family, friends, community, and reality. Vashti has created her own reality in lieu of facing life.

Vashti, like Eddie in *Homer and Eddie*, must pay for her crime. While Eddie pays with her life, it is evident that Vashti will pay with her sanity. It is almost impossible not to feel sorry for this woman. As she listens to the sounds of traffic accidents and sirens she seems utterly alone. The magnitude of the city exacerbates her loneliness. Who will care or even notice if the this woman degenerates into insanity. No real friends or family appear in this film. Her husband has left her without a word. Her lifeline has mutated from family and/or community to the disconnected telephone. When she cannot pay the phone bill her "family" fails her.

Vashti is a victim, a loner who eventually becomes insane. Yet, she does not typify the mammy type which has meant so much to Goldberg's film career. The audience cannot

easily identify with this insane, Black, female character. They recognize nothing of themselves in which to ground knowing a Vashti. As a result, the film fails at the box-office and Goldberg's film career is threatened. Film history is littered with the bodies of talented actors for whom Hollywood could not find a marketing niche. This almost describes the fate of Whoopi Goldberg, at least until she stars in *Clara's Hart*.

CONCLUSION

Whoopi Goldberg has been able to play an abundant and wide range of characters, at least on the surface. She has portrayed everything from a computer programmer caught up in international espionage to a Black Lesbian and a white man. Whatever her role, Goldberg is always the slightly masculine, largely androgynous, character who maintains a safe distance from any exhibition of culture, family, or sexuality. Even when culture, family and sexuality are at the very heart of a movie. Hollywood is careful not to deviate from the formula that has allowed them to endear Goldberg to the hearts of mainstream cinema audiences. The foundation of Goldberg's success has been her usefulness for making Blackness palatable for mainstream film audiences.

Whenever Hollywood has allowed a Black actor to inhabit the echelons of stardom, they manage to utilize the cross-over formula. The reigning queen of cross-over, for the moment, is Whoopi Goldberg. Goldberg is rarely, if at all, presented in films where she mothers Black children, is involved in relationships with Black men, or is in significant friendships with other Black women. The way she is and is not presented on film is directly relational to how she will be perceived by her audience. Mainstream audiences

are not overly interested in negotiating images of Black people where the realities of this present society are called into question. A film is still the place to go to escape reality. Whoopi Goldberg is the one Black actor mainstream audiences are sure won't make them traverse their filmic comfort zones.

However, Hollywood is not able to categorize Goldberg as easily or readily as it has some of its past Black comedic stars. Afterall, they have to consider Goldberg's gender and all the connotations a Black woman's body bears. It is not until the success of *Clara's Hart*, with its revitalization of the mammy figure, that Hollywood is able to find Goldberg's niche. *Clara's Hart* sets a precedent and creates a place for Goldberg in Hollywood cinema. Although the theme of Goldberg's films are different, at the heart of them is Goldberg as the good guy/girl, savior, facilitator and nurturer. The significance of these roles is that Goldberg becomes the most contracted Black actor in Hollywood. She even surpasses many white Hollywood superstars in terms of salary, notoriety, and the sheer volume of her work. No other Black actor in Hollywood has reached the status that Goldberg has attained. Yet, the foundation of her phenomenal career is built on the mammy figure. Hollywood filmmakers find ways for Goldberg to play her over and over again. On the surface, the very fact of Goldberg's success seems to say that Hollywood is finally a land of opportunity for Blacks. But sadly, that is not what her success denotes.

Mainstream audiences are still not interested in engaging multidimensional depictions of Black women or Black people in general.

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I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'H. Yarandi', is written over a horizontal line.

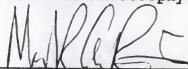
Hossein N. Yarandi
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Nursing

This dissertation was submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the Department of English in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and to the Graduate School and was accepted as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

August 1999

Dean, Graduate School

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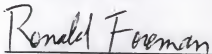
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